

Women in STEM Decadal Plan

Murdoch Children's Research Institute Response

February 2024



Our purpose

To give children the
opportunity to live a healthy
and fulfilled life



Our commitment



"Our Institute is absolutely committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of our organisation. Not only because it aligns with our work and values, but because we know that equitable diverse and inclusive workplaces are more productive, more innovative and achieve better outcomes."

Professor Kathryn North AC

Director,
Murdoch Children's Research Institute

About us

For more than 35 years, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) has been changing what is possible through medical breakthroughs and child health discoveries. Founded by Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE and pioneering geneticist Professor David Danks, their bold vision that genetics would one day become a standard part of healthcare helped establish the Murdoch Institute for Birth Defects in 1986.

In early 2000, the Murdoch Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital Research Institute merged to form Murdoch Children's Research Institute, with a broader focus on child health research, including public health and clinical research.

Today, MCRI is a global leader in child health, and Australia's largest child health research centre. MCRI is recognised as one of the top three child health research institutes worldwide for research quality and impact.

We have over 3,000+ researchers and staff working across more than 150 diseases and conditions affecting children.

From allergies and asthma, to cancer and rare genetic disorders, we are relentless in our pursuit to improve the lives of all children.

Operating in a unique model with The Royal Children's Hospital and The University of Melbourne Department of Paediatrics, the three organisations form the Melbourne Children's Campus. Our priority is healthcare and discovery - transforming child health from research into practice within our communities.



Leadership and cohesion

Led by Professor Kathryn North AC, MCRI is a large organisation with 79% of our workforce identifying as female. Currently, 40.6% of the senior leadership positions are held by women, and 50% of our executive committee members are female.

What we do

- Enrolled in the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) program to address any systemic barriers to gender equity and inclusion within our workplace. From August 2021 to October 2023, 53 members of MCRI's SAGE Self-Assessment Team (SAT) volunteered their time, skills, and expertise to support the data collection, analysis, and action planning that has formed the basis of this application. Members spanned across MCRI and ranged from students to executives.
- Active and collaborative partnership with the Women in Science Parkville Precinct (WiSPP), including representation in the executive WiSPP team. WiSPP aims to support, encourage, and transform research systems to be more inclusive and equitable.
- Several internal grant schemes to support parental leave, including five women over the last five years have been supported with a Research Support Award, to assist them in keeping their research programs active – this is crucial for the retention of emerging female leaders in research.
- Leadership training for staff and students at different levels of competency and experience. Strong uptake has been seen by women (~73% attendance were women) in these programs, and MCRI aims to encourage all staff to develop their skills as a leader.
- Participation from senior leaders in gender equity-focussed events, including speed networking, film festivals and presentations.
- Ensure that our Diversity and inclusion statement is clearly visible at MCRI reception.

What we aim to do

- Strive to have gender balance throughout all our board, executive, and decision-making committees by 2030.
- Team and group leaders to increase awareness of our new parental leave policy within their teams, particularly encouraging male uptake of primary caregiver leave, and adhering to our family-friendly meeting time policy (9:30am - 4pm).
- Engage an independent auditor to review internal performance, career development, and salary review processes across all groups in the institute
- Better career development policies and pathways, building in other metrics (apart publications etc) to facilitate career progression.
- Increasing the representation of women at senior levels (level C and above) to reflect institute gender demographics (~80% female, 20% male), including a yearly review of this progress to ensure we are tracking towards this target.
- Develop and curate compulsory leadership training for all People leaders to ensure they equipped to lead in an equitable, inclusive and appropriate manner.

Evaluation

What we do

- MCRI has recently received the SAGE BRONZE award in the SAGE accreditation pathway. We began this process in 2021, with the data collection evaluation phase launching in 2022.
- Through this process a comprehensive collection of diversity data has been collected from our staff, and evaluation of this data has begun.
- We comply with the annual Workplace Gender Equity Agency (WGEA) reporting program, which collects and reports gender equity data on all Australian workplaces. These reports are [publicly accessible](#).
- Our People and Culture team conducted a 'People experience survey' in 2022, to evaluate if MCRI staff, students and volunteers feel supported, and identify any gaps which impede on a positive organisational culture. This data is now being used to inform future activities, generate new policies, and provide feedback to our People Leaders.

What we aim to do

- Address the remaining gaps identified through the People and Culture survey.
- Conduct an extensive audit of MCRI's professional development frameworks, including performance and salary reviews processes. This will be followed by the implementation of the reimagined framework, tackling any inequities identified throughout the audit phase.
- Plan and implement a centralised location to store staff data, and include an intersectional lens to capture traditionally under-represented groups.
- Monitor and expand on MCRI's on-boarding and off-boarding (exit survey) surveys to better understand any issues we have in the retention of traditionally under-represented groups.



Workplace culture

What we do

- We have made our policies more gender neutral. One example of this is making it easier for males to take parental leave, and encouraging uptake of this policy through internal communications.
- MCRI strives to offer competitive and flexible options for parental leave, including 12 – 16 weeks of paid parental leave, and up to 12 months of unpaid parental leave for the primary caregiver. Secondary caregivers are also offered two weeks of paid parental leave, and a further six weeks of unpaid parental leave. To promote equity in caregiving responsibilities, secondary caregivers can also become primary caregivers and take the appropriate leave afforded.
- The “MCRI Maternity Leave Research Support Award for Women” awards \$25 000 to female postdoctoral researchers, allowing for the employment of research support staff to continue her work during maternity leave.
- The “MCRI Career Interruption Award” awards its recipient (male or female) a grant of up to \$15 000. This is to support researchers who are primary caregivers to take the leave they need to care for their family.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, MCRI launched the ‘Flexi-75’ scheme which allowed employees struggling with competing demands at home to work at 75% capacity while continuing to be paid at their full contracted hours.
- Mentor program to provide support, peer learning, and career growth opportunities for early-mid career researcher. This has also recently been extended to include research support staff and junior staff.
- The SAGE accreditation process aims to identify and address issues relating to workplace culture.
- Our Diversity and Inclusion committee, including sub-committees of Accessibility, Cultural Diversity, Gender Equity, and Pride, organise social events for employees to raise awareness for particular causes and strengthen workplace cohesion (e.g. International Women’s Day, IDAHOBIT day, International Men’s Day, Harmony Week).
- Speed networking events to facilitate opportunities for junior employees to network with experienced employees and learn about their career trajectories and challenges they’ve experienced.
- Onboarding modules for new staff on bullying, harassment, and respect in the workplace.
- Participation in the Midsumma festival Pride march since 2022, under the MCRI banner.
- Provision for onsite childcare available through co-location with the Royal Children’s Hospital.
- Nappy change tables have been installed in MCRI disabled toilets, and breastfeeding rooms are available through co-location with the Royal Children’s Hospital.
- Wheelchair-accessible cold and hot water tap available in the main team room.



Workplace culture

What we aim to do

- Evaluate performance review procedures and implement a revised framework.
- Continued facilitation of events to promote workplace cohesion and career growth for all staff.
- Be responsive to feedback and suggestions collected through the SAGE evaluation process and internal People and Culture survey.
- Undertake a comprehensive review of outdated policies and procedures to ensure they are inclusive and reflect staff diversity
- Promote an equitable organisational culture by having gender, equity, diversity and inclusion built into policies, procedures, practices, programs at all levels.
- Wellbeing sessions for leaders on managing workloads and looking after wellbeing, including setting realistic goals and expectations for their staff.
- Commitment to amplify the voices of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and a commitment to hire more staff from Aboriginal communities, and build better relationships with Aboriginal communities (by consultation with community to inform alignment with community expectations).
- Appoint Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers on 3-year contracts to create job security and encourage longevity.
- Repurposing of the D&I committee to oversee the implementation of the SAGE action plan (dedicated members).
- Developing a clearer framework for flexible working arrangements (e.g. hybrid meetings, care arrangements).
- De-identified recruitment procedures to facilitate non-biased and equitable shortlisting and interview processes.
- More definitive promotion and/or progression opportunities for non-researcher staff, with clearer pathways for career progression.
- Incentivise committee participation to alleviate burden on traditionally underrepresented staff who regularly complete this work, including increased funding allocation.
- Establish wellbeing leave days, that are separate from personal or carer's leave.
- Rollout of LGBTQIA+ campus strategy.
- Enforce a family friendly meeting time policy: i.e. that all group meetings are held between 9:30am – 4:00pm.
- Expand internal grant schemes to support further parental leave and career disruptions.



Visibility

What we do

- Regular opportunities to showcase notable achievements of research leaders through internal and external communications including social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). ~50% of social media posts this year to date have female research leaders.
- Publish the vision and activities of the Diversity and Inclusion committee on MCRI's public website, and in more detail on the internal-facing Intranet.
- Raise awareness about various gender and intersectionality issues (e.g. 16 Days of Activism, International Day of People with Disability, International Women's Day) by way of internal communications.
- Celebration of employee excellence internally, across all levels and genders through annual staff-wide town hall meetings and electronic communications.
- Our Director, Prof. Kathryn North, is committed to gender equity in Australian research, which she promoted through her role as President of The Association of Australian Medical Research Institute November 2021 – November 2023



What we aim to do

- Increase the proportion of female speakers at internal seminars to 50%.
- Continue to actively seek opportunities to make our female researchers and their work more visible.
- Continue to spread awareness and place importance in the value of gender equity in research.
- Establish more regular opportunities for visibility of employee excellence beyond the annual staff awards.

Education

What we do

- Through our strong ties with the University of Melbourne, and other partnering institutes, MCRI has a strong history of supporting Honours, Masters and Ph.D. students. In the past decade, ~75% of students based at MCRI have been female.
- Students are well-supported to learn, upskill and build a community through groups like the Research Students Association, and in an ongoing nature through MCRI's Postdoc society.
- Various training programs are available internally to help develop a skilled workforce of researchers and research support staff, like the Mentor program, and the Society of Team members and Associates of Research network (STAR network).
- One of our flagship projects Generation Victoria runs a student and volunteer program, maximising the benefit of this state-wide cohort study and providing the opportunity for students to gain experience within a multi-disciplinary team.
- There are several weekly and monthly seminars that aim to inform researchers of ground-breaking unpublished research, to foster feedback, innovative thinking, and collaboration.



What we aim to do

- Continue to support and strengthen a thriving student community, and inspire longevity as a researcher, particularly for our female students.
- Explore additional and more direct pathways to become a student with MCRI. Currently students must be enrolled through a university.
- Improved opportunities for First Nations students to study at MCRI, with the aim of fostering a more diverse workplace.



This report was compiled by MCRI's Gender Equity committee.
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