

**Announcing FBC's
2021 Clinician
Scientist
Emerging
Leader Award**
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**COVID-19 &
Eye Care in Canada**

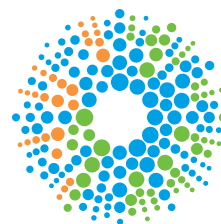
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**FIGHTING
BLINDNESS
CANADA**

Charitable Registration Number: 119129369 RR0001

MESSAGE FROM FBC'S REVIEW PANEL CHAIRS

Dear friend,

As Chairs of Fighting Blindness Canada's (FBC) review panels, we are delighted to bring you exciting news about FBC's 2021 research competitions! Grants awarded from these competitions support leading scientists to pursue innovative research to understand the causes of eye disease and develop new treatments and cures for blinding eye diseases.

FBC's 2021 Research Grant Competition

This competition solicits applications from all areas of vision research and provides a budget of up to \$200,000 over two years. These grants provide crucial seed funding, allowing researchers to test new hypotheses and innovative ideas. It sets them up to apply for larger grants to expand the scope of their project. Applications were due in July and we will be leading a rigorous peer-review process in the fall to determine which projects have scientific merit and are pushing the boundaries of vision research.

FBC's Eye on the Cure Awards

This new competition raises funds for vision research and inspires Canadians by providing early career vision researchers the opportunity to compete head-to-head for awards to support their research. Winners will be selected by a panel of celebrity judges and an esteemed academy of jurors with the event taking place November 13th, 2021. Learn more at fightingblindness.ca/eyeonthecure.

FBC's 2021 Clinician-Scientist Emerging Leader (CSEL) Award

Clinician-scientists play an essential role in developing new sight-saving treatments. FBC's CSEL Award aims to strengthen the community of clinician-scientists by enabling the next generation of clinicians to incorporate research into their careers. We are thrilled to announce the three recipients of the 2021 CSEL Award on page 4-5 of this newsletter.

Funding the best, most promising researchers and ground-breaking projects would not be possible without your support. Vision research awards and programs funded by FBC continue to transform the lives of so many. If you are able, please give generously to accelerate vision research for over 8 million Canadians living with a blinding eye disease.

Together, we are moving research forward.

With gratitude,



Carol Schuurmans, PhD
Sunnybrook
Research Institute



Ian MacDonald, MD CM
University of
Alberta



Chairs, Fighting Blindness Canada Review Panels

COVID-19 & EYE CARE IN CANADA

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives, including the provision of eye care in Canada. The impact on Canadians' eye health is outlined in a new report released by Fighting Blindness Canada in partnership with the Canadian Council of the Blind and organizations representing Optometrists and Ophthalmologists.

The report showed that there was a delay or cancellation of many eye care appointments, treatments, and almost 150,000 surgeries which led to an estimated 1,437 people losing vision in 2020.

This vision loss caused by a delay in diagnosis and treatment is estimated to increase costs of eye care by an additional \$39.1 million every year.

In addition, other Canadians are likely to have ongoing impacts on their eye health and quality of life, and other financial impacts due to the backlog of services such as cataract surgery.

Longer eye surgery wait times will have an estimated \$1.3 billion impact over the next three years, including \$253.3 million in health care costs and over \$1 billion in lost quality of life.

COVID-19 continues to challenge the Canadian healthcare system. The full extent of reduced eye care continues to be investigated and data collected to assess the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on the eye health of Canadians.

Learn more about
the report at
StopVisionLoss.ca

Report Findings

- **Report findings show the reduction in utilization of ophthalmic services reduced the cost of vision loss to the healthcare system by \$720 million in 2020.** However, there are likely to be ongoing impacts between 2021 and 2023, and beyond, for major eye conditions including cataract, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy.
- **An estimated 1,437 people lost vision due to delayed eye examinations and delayed treatment (injections or surgeries) in 2020.** Given the average annual cost of a case of vision loss is \$27,250, delayed examinations and treatment means that the incremental costs from vision loss may be \$39.1 million higher each year compared to pre-pandemic.
- **The backlog of services is likely to impose significant costs for individuals with sight threatening eye disease.** In part, these costs occur due to increased risk of falls and reduced quality of life while waiting and the need for more complex surgeries with potentially worse vision outcomes.
- **36% reduction in ophthalmic same day procedures in 2020.** There was a 36% reduction in ophthalmic same day procedures over a nine month period in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, leading to an estimated 143,071 fewer services provided in 2020.

FBC'S 2021 CLINICIAN SCIENTIST EMERGING LEADER AWARD RECIPIENTS

We are thrilled to award the 2021 Clinician Scientist Emerging Leader (CSEL) Award to three very deserving vision researchers. This award was launched to help build the pipeline of early career clinician-scientists who help move discoveries from the laboratory to the clinic.



FBC'S 2021 CSEL AWARD RECIPIENTS ARE...

Dr. Gobert

Investigating the Role of Microglia in Diabetic Retinopathy

Dr. Delphine Gobert, MD, PhD, of Université Laval completed a PhD and postdoctoral fellowship in neuroscience before pursuing a medical degree. She is currently a second-year ophthalmology resident and brings a stellar research track record to her new role as a clinician scientist. "As an aspiring clinician-scientist, I hope to translate knowledge acquired during my graduate studies to more specific retinal diseases such as diabetic retinopathy."

Dr. Gobert will investigate how a type of immune cell called microglia may play a role in the development of diabetic retinopathy which affects over 1 million Canadians. Dr. Gobert hopes this research will lead to new therapies for diabetic retinopathy.





Dr. Felfeli

Developing a Better Way to Diagnose and Manage Non-infectious Uveitis

Dr. Tina Felfeli, MD, is currently pursuing a combined ophthalmology residency and PhD at the University of Toronto. The aim of Dr. Felfeli's project is to identify better diagnostic and treatment strategies for individuals with non-infectious uveitis. Dr. Felfeli will use state of the art techniques including proteomics, artificial intelligence, and economic modelling, to identify treatment pathways which can reduce the risk of vision loss.

"Our team hopes to promote a multidisciplinary approach to the future of ophthalmology research with the overall goal of advancing health outcomes for patients with vision impairment."

Bring a Bright Future into Focus with Monthly Giving

Help change the lives of people living with vision loss by joining our monthly giving program. For information, contact **Josie Koumandaros 1.800.461.3331 x 262** jkoumandaros@fightingblindness.ca



Dr. Ong Tone

Testing Virus-mediated Gene Therapy to Treat Fuchs Endothelial Corneal Dystrophy

Dr. Stephan Ong Tone, MD, PhD, is a clinician-scientist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and Sunnybrook Research Institute, and an assistant professor at University of Toronto. Dr. Ong Tone will be developing a CRISPR-based gene therapy to treat Fuchs endothelial corneal dystrophy (FECD), an eye disease that can cause vision loss due to fluid accumulation in the cornea.

The disease is currently treated with corneal transplant surgery and more treatment options are urgently needed. Dr. Ong Tone's research could lead to personalized gene therapy treatments for patients with FECD.

"I am pursuing a career as a clinician-scientist to combine my passion for medicine, Ophthalmology, and helping patients with various eye conditions, with my enthusiasm for scientific discovery."

Dr. Delphine Gobert and Dr. Tina Felfeli are the recipients of the **Andrew and Valerie Pringle Inspiring Future Vision Stars Award**. The CSEL Awards have been made possible through the generous support of **Andrew and Valerie Pringle, Dr. Peter Kertes, the Bank of Montreal, and Bayer Inc.**

TOGETHER, WE MOVED!

Cycle for Sight Virtual 2021, held on Saturday, June 19th, was an amazing success! With 555 participants joining from across Canada, we raised an astonishing \$450,000.



Thank you to all who participated, donated, and supported this event. What we accomplished this year is nothing short of amazing! Thank you to our host Ramya Amuthan, and interactive program leaders for volunteering their time. Thank you to our Cycle for Sight sponsors for helping provide a brighter future for Canadians living with vision loss. You have all played a significant role in advancing vision research.

L'OCCITANE GIVE \$120,000 TOWARDS FBC'S MISSION



Over a decade ago, FBC had the honour of being introduced to L'OCCITANE Canada and the L'OCCITANE Foundation, a foundation founded in 2006 to bring together and develop charity initiatives undertaken by the L'OCCITANE brand. The L'OCCITANE Foundation expressed their ambitious goal to FBC of providing eye care to 15 million beneficiaries around the world by 2025 – as leaders in vision research, FBC was committed to working together to helping them reach this goal.

And, as the L'OCCITANE Foundation learned more about FBC's mission to advance vision research, they became very interested in becoming part of FBC's efforts; participating as an event sponsor for FBC's Cycle for Sight event and growing the partnership year-after-year to where it is today, giving over \$120,000!

These funds have helped FBC develop and uphold its Health Information services, comprised of a Health Information Line and an online Eye Health Resource Hub that serves individuals seeking information regarding their eye health.

"L'OCCITANE Canada and the L'OCCITANE Foundation's support has been a big part of FBC's sheer ability to do more to make a greater impact. Our rich partnership of almost a decade, has enabled us to develop and expand our Health Information services; helping serve and educate so many impacted by vision loss." Jaime Alexanderson, Senior Manager Development, Fighting Blindness Canada.

Sophie Genin, General Delegate, L'OCCITANE Foundation shares, "What inspired us to support FBC was the ambition to raise awareness and improve vision health and research on a large scale. We were very happy and proud to support FBC's Health Information launch and become part of this work!"

On behalf of the entire FBC team and community, we can't thank L'OCCITANE Canada and the L'OCCITANE Foundation enough for their partnership and commitment to supporting Canadians, and so many around the world, living with vision loss – their generosity has helped make the future hopeful and bright.

MORT & MARILYN RITZ SUPPORT VISION RESEARCH INTO THE FUTURE

Meet long-time FBC supporters Mort and Marilyn Ritz. Both born and raised in Montreal, married for over 64 years with two children and a grandchild. They moved to Toronto 22 years ago to be closer to their daughter.

Their first exposure to vision loss was experienced in Marilyn's family when her uncle was diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration (AMD). At that time there was limited research and treatments being offered for AMD. Due to this, her uncle lost his sight.

Their next exposure to vision loss was with their son who required a cornea transplant at a young age – a scary experience for the entire family.

Then, as Marilyn aged, she began to notice her vision decreasing. It was discovered that she too had AMD like her uncle.

The couple was introduced to FBC by Marilyn's eye doctor, Dr. Swartz at Sunnybrook Hospital. She encouraged Marilyn and Mort to attend a lecture hosted by FBC. They were thrilled to learn about innovative FBC-funded vision research at the lecture and made the decision to support FBC's mission to advance the development of treatments for blinding eye diseases.

Over the years, Marilyn and Mort have seen the results of their support. When asked why vision research is important to them, Marilyn shares, "Because I can see in my lifetime the advances that have taken place. Not too long ago there was very little vision research taking place in Canada. There was no hope for those experiencing vision loss. Today, we can see advancements and our support is helping those advancements."



When asked why they each became FBC monthly donors, Mort shares, "We saw that Fighting Blindness Canada used our gifts well in support of vision research. It was an easy decision for us each to become monthly donors and it makes giving easier for us."

After consultation with their financial advisor and lawyer, the couple also made the decision to include FBC in their Will. This was described as a natural decision for the couple, "...it is an extension of our current giving to vision research so that when we're gone, we know that the gifts we are leaving will continue to support vision research into the future." says Mort.

Marilyn also added, "Although my eye-sight has failed, my life is full and my support of Fighting Blindness Canada is one small way I can help others."

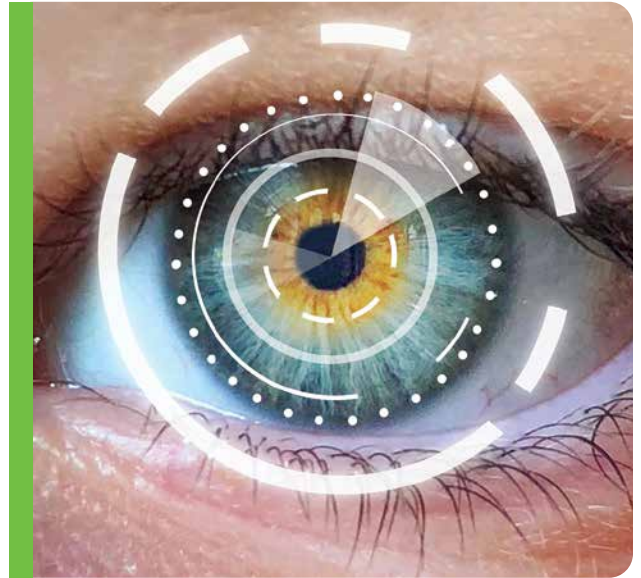
We can't thank the Ritz's enough for their ongoing support in providing hope to Canadians living with vision loss. To learn about becoming a monthly donor or how to leave a gift in your Will to FBC, contact our Donor Relations Manager, Doug Smith at **1.800.461.3331 x 237** or **dsmith@fightingblindness.ca**

FBC EVENTS COMING THIS FALL

EYE ON THE CURE AWARDS SHOW

Saturday, November 13th

Take part in identifying the next possible treatment or cure for vision loss! On Saturday, November 13th, early stage vision researchers will battle it out in front of celebrity judges for \$100,000 in prizes to support their innovations and launch their careers. Audience members will also be able to vote for the People's Choice Award of \$30,000! Learn more at fightingblindness.ca/eyeonthecure



COMEDY FROM THE COUCH

Saturday, September 25th

We're excited to announce the return of our virtual Comedy from the Couch fundraising event on Saturday, September 25th! This year, we've partnered with Just for Laughs to give you more comedy, more fun and more laughs! Learn more and purchase your event tickets at comicvision.ca



VIEW POINT

Virtual Education Series

View Point education webinars are back this fall! join us for our first fall webinar:
Inherited Retinal Disease Research Spotlight
Tuesday, September 14th
3 – 4:30 p.m, ET
Register at fightingblindness.ca/events

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