

YOUR IMPACT

DAN WOMEN & BABIES PROGRAM



Trailblazing patient care: Gabriella Carafa holds hands with her daughter Giovanna, who was born two years ago in Sunnybrook's Accessible Care Pregnancy Clinic, the first of its kind in North America. Gabriella reflects on the impact of donor support and the exceptional care she received. "There are future generations growing up now who will have so many more options for safe care because of Sunnybrook," says Gabriella. Our high-performing teams are changing practice well beyond the clinic.

Introducing the new Chief of Sunnybrook's DAN Women & Babies Program

In July 2023, I was honoured to be appointed Chief of Sunnybrook's DAN Women & Babies Program, succeeding Dr. Arthur Zaltz. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his outstanding leadership over the past ten years. Without Dr. Zaltz's contributions, we would not have built the multidisciplinary team that is at the heart of our success.

DAN Women & Babies Program is proudly home to multiple divisions, each excelling in their own rights: maternal-fetal medicine, gynaecology, gynaecologic oncology, obstetrics and neonatal care.

What unites our work is an unwavering commitment to trailblazing patient care. Your support is essential to advancing care, whether it's conducting research to bring new discoveries from bench-to-bedside, focusing on quality improvements for our tiniest patients, or partnering with health-care providers to reduce surgical wait times, we are unified in our approach.

When I look to the future, I am excited by the possibilities that lay ahead of us. My ambition as Chief is to expand upon our successes to date, strengthening connections both within and beyond the walls of Sunnybrook. My academic background at the University of Toronto includes postgraduate training in obstetrics and gynaecology, as well as a Master of Education degree and represents my holistic view in my role as Chief. My hope is to empower both staff and patients with vital training to foster growth institutionally – and individually.

And behind Team Sunnybrook is the steadfast support of our donor community, accelerating the pace of our work.

With your investment, Sunnybrook is empowered to take leaps, not steps, forward. I look forward to sharing more momentous updates in the coming years.

Sincerely,



Dr. Janet Bodley

Chief, DAN Women & Babies Program
Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre



“Your generosity enables us to be creative and ask big questions in order to improve treatment and care.

Without the trust and support of donors, novel approaches and ideas would take more time to reach patients.

Thank you for all you make possible. Together, we are trailblazing patient care.”

- Dr. Janet Bodley

Your impact on **GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH**

Donor support for the Waugh Family Chair in Twin Fetal Medicine Research and the Waks Family Chair in Maternal Fetal Medicine Research is transforming care for parents and our tiniest patients.



Using artificial intelligence to predict pre-term birth

Twin pregnancies and twin infants are up to five times more likely to experience complications compared to singletons. Dr. Nir Melamed is seeking to understand why. A few of Dr. Melamed's notable projects as Waugh Family Chair include:

- **Developing a new AI-based prediction tool** to drastically improve the detection of people at high risk for preterm birth;
- **Establishing new guidelines for healthy fetal weight in twin pregnancies**, thanks to results from a Sunnybrook-led study that showed twin fetuses grow slower than single fetuses;
- **Educating and empowering patients with resources** through the expansion of Sunnybrook's Twin Research Centre website.

"Philanthropy allows us to take discoveries further, scaling them up to reach more patients and deliver greater impact," says Dr. Melamed. "Thank you for your continued belief in our work."

New technique for early detection of genetic disorders

Since joining Sunnybrook in 2022, Sascha Drewlo, PhD, has established a solid platform for his basic science research and is developing precise treatments to prevent complications for parents and babies. With donor support, Dr. Drewlo is:

- **Collaborating amongst the best** with local and international institutions to submit joint grant applications exploring how to identify patients at risk for abnormal pregnancy outcomes;
- **Developing a patented technique for diagnosing early genetic disorders** with a simple pap smear;
- **Training next-generation researchers** at the University of Toronto's newly established reproductive sciences program – Dr. Drewlo led the largest research day of its in kind in North America.

"The partnership of our donor community has been instrumental to my achievements at Sunnybrook," says Dr. Drewlo. "I am grateful for your support."

Your impact on

NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE AT SUNNYBROOK

Sunnybrook's DAN Women & Babies program has achieved the best outcomes for premature infants in Canada when compared to other Level III neonatal intensive care units across the country. Two leaders are at the helm of this monumental success and have bigger aspirations in mind.

A laser focus on quality improvements



Dr. Asaph Rolnitsky is the new Chief, Newborn and Developmental Paediatrics, which oversees the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Dr. Rolnitsky trained in paediatrics at Schneider Children's Medical Centre of Israel before completing a neonatal-perinatal medicine fellowship at the University of Toronto.

Dr. Rolnitsky's expertise is in quality improvement – a systematic approach that is guided by data to elevate the quality and safety of health-care delivery. Quality improvement involves reviewing medical data and analyzing processes. That data informs areas for refinement and highlights areas of excellence to improve patient outcomes, achieve efficiency in the delivery of care and reduce health-care costs.

At Sunnybrook, Dr. Rolnitsky is using quality improvement to gain valuable insights on measurements of interventions in neonatal medicine, paying particular focus on micropremature infants, born before the 26th week of pregnancy. The team looks at variables such as ventilation, neurodevelopment, gut function, kidney function and other data points to fine-tune their approach. This has resulted in Sunnybrook achieving some of the best outcomes in North America.

Dr. Rolnitsky points to the power of fellowships to share Sunnybrook's unique expertise: **“The generosity of our donors allows us to increase our education capacity for trainees who will spread excellent neonatal care worldwide. In this way, your support has a ripple effect and extends to even more families in need of specialized care. Thank you.”**



47 new cameras foster family connections at Sunnybrook

At Sunnybrook, parents and caregivers are a vital part of each baby's care team, with access to the neonatal intensive care unit 24 hours a day. Some babies stay only a few hours or days; others for weeks or months.

Donor support for new bedside cameras is giving families more chances to bond with their baby and stay connected during an uncertain time – no matter the distance.

“Previously, our nurses would help take video calls from parents and families to connect them with their baby,” says Dr. Rolnitsky. “The new cameras provide a solution that increases capacity for our team and helps connect families.”

Donor investment allowed Sunnybrook to purchase 47 new cameras for the NICU. This vital equipment is helping families find greater comfort during a difficult period and enhances bonding with their newborns.

Setting families on a path for success

Dr. Rudaina Banihani is the Medical Director of Sunnybrook's Neonatal Follow-up Clinic. As both a neonatologist and developmental paediatrician, she is among the few dual-trained experts in Canada with specialized knowledge that significantly benefits NICU graduates, especially preterm infants.

Dr. Banihani is committed to ensuring that babies in the care of the follow-up clinic go beyond surviving – she wants children and their families truly thriving.

To meet this bold ambition, Dr. Banihani and her multidisciplinary team at the Neonatal Follow-Up Clinic provide personalized plans for premature infants, who receive follow-up care all the way through to age nine. Sunnybrook is unique in providing extended follow-up care for NICU graduates into their school-age years, providing families with support for longer than other comparable neonatal units in Canada.

But even with their success, Dr. Banihani and her team are continuously striving to improve a child's transition out of hospital care. Sunnybrook is behind an initiative called Building Optimal Opportunities for Smooth Transition (BOOST) to help parents build confidence and skills as they transition their infants home.

For example, both parents and infants benefit from bonding together on walks outdoors. However, infants in the NICU often require strollers with specialized features, such as additional space to carry oxygen tanks.

Sunnybrook recently introduced the Supportive Therapeutic Excursion Program (STEP) as part of its larger initiative, BOOST. STEP provides tailored strollers for NICU families to bond during walks on hospital grounds.

A study on STEP was published in the international journal *Children*, with promising results. STEP brought a normalcy that was reported to bolster participants' self-efficacy and connectedness – two important elements that help parents recover from the stress that may be experienced while infants are in the NICU.

Dr. Banihani aims to expand this study to explore how Sunnybrook and similar programs within BOOST can better support parents before hospital discharge, ensuring a smoother transition for families.



Sunnybrook's Premie Picnic reunites families with care teams

Bubbles, ice cream and hugs with old friends: On July 8, 2023, Sunnybrook's Premie Picnic returned for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The celebration of infants who have stayed in Sunnybrook's neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) attracted over 350 attendees and provides a valuable opportunity for families to reconnect with their care teams at the DAN Women & Babies Program.

Sunnybrook is a Level III high-risk neonatal unit, providing the highest level of care to the most vulnerable infants.

Sunnybrook's NICU cares for one in five babies in Ontario who weigh less than 1.5 kilograms. Many families also continue to receive care through the Neonatal Follow-Up Clinic.

The day at the park was fun for NICU graduates like Hunter (*pictured above*), and a powerful reminder of how donor support for our high-performing teams makes a profound difference to families.



Meet Gabriella and Giovanna: “Hope changes everything.”

A uniquely person-centred approach to pregnancy care defines Sunnybrook’s DAN Women & Babies Program and its Accessible Care Pregnancy Clinic.

Established in 2017 by Sunnybrook high-risk obstetrician Dr. Anne Berndl, the clinic – North America’s first – provides specialized care for women, trans and non-binary people with physical disabilities who are pregnant or contemplating a pregnancy.

Gabriella Carafa is one of the more than 200 patients who have benefitted from the clinic’s multidisciplinary assessment and care.

“When I did become pregnant, challenges were navigated together and successes were celebrated together,” says Gabriella, who welcomed her daughter with the support of Dr. Berndl and advanced practice nurse Liz Jung two years ago.

“It was always a conversation of possibility when it came to discussing my care,” says Gabriella, who brings a similar approach to her own work as a perinatal social worker.

The Accessible Care Pregnancy Clinic is supported by donors who value Sunnybrook’s commitment to health equity and personalized care for people with complex health needs.

“There’s such a history of prejudice and bias against people with physical disabilities yet we know that we can help many people have a safe and healthy pregnancy,” Dr. Berndl explains. She and her team prioritize personalized care that is respectful, cognizant of each person’s individuality and grounded in an understanding that every patient is an expert in their own body and their lives.

Sunnybrook’s Accessible Care Pregnancy Clinic is widely regarded as the model for high-quality obstetrical care. Believing that every person with disability has a right to barrier-free care, Dr. Berndl and her team wrote and published the world’s first clinical guidelines to assess birth care for people with disabilities through the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. Want to learn more? **Scan the QR code to hear from patient Diana Drake about her journey.**



Your impact on

LIFE-CHANGING GYNAECOLOGICAL CARE

Dr. Jamie Kroft is advancing Sunnybrook's expertise in minimally invasive gynaecological surgery and raising the profile of endometriosis and other diseases that impact people with uteruses. Dr. Kroft is now partnering with three other Toronto hospitals to reduce patient wait times for treatment.

It's an all-too familiar scenario for Dr. Kroft (*pictured right*): meeting a patient with endometriosis who has spent years without a diagnosis and appropriate care to address the chronic disease known for causing severe pain and infertility.

"Some patients wait up to 10 years – or longer – to get a diagnosis, and then need to wait again to receive treatment," explains Dr. Kroft. She is now working with hospitals across Toronto to reduce the surgical backlog for gynaecology procedures and helping patients receive life-changing surgeries faster.

A collaborative initiative between four Toronto Academic Health Science Network hospitals – Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Women's College Hospital, Mount Sinai Hospital and Humber River Health – has successfully launched the first phase of a project aimed at tackling the backlog for these surgeries in the Toronto region.

Using funding received through the Ontario Ministry of Health's Surgical and Diagnostic Imaging Efficiency & Innovation Initiative, the project is on track to surpass its initial target of completing 335 benign gynaecological surgeries in just three months. This represents more than a quarter of Ontario patients who have surpassed their surgical target wait time targets (known as long waiters) as of December 2023.

"This partnership has made strides in improving how quickly we treat patients in need of gynaecology procedures," says Dr. Kroft. "With strong support from the government, hospitals have been able to work together to address waitlists now, and hopefully in the future, in a sustainable way."



Dream team assembled

Recently Dr. Kroft assembled what she calls an all-female "dream team" for a combined thoracic and gynaecology surgery for a patient whose endometriosis had impacted several major organs.

The surgery was the first of its kind in Toronto and took 10 hours. Today, the patient says she has "zero pain."

That's the power of Sunnybrook's DAN Women & Babies Program and investment in our high-performing teams.

OUR THANKS TO YOU

Sunnybrook's DAN Women & Babies Program is boldly advancing research, treatment and care for pregnant people and their families.

Behind our success is the trust and commitment of our donor community.

Together, we are trailblazing patient care for parents, caregivers and the tiniest babies.