

2026 WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCH INSTITUTE LEVELING UP: WOMEN'S AND NEWBORN HEALTH RESEARCH ACTION GRANT

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Important dates:

Letter of Intent (LOI)	September 4, 2026 11PM PDT
Invitation to Submit Full Application	September 14, 2026
Application Deadline	October 7, 2026 11PM PDT
Anticipated Notice of Decision	November 30, 2026
Funding Start Date	December 1, 2026

Description

The Women's Health Research Institute (WHRI) has established the **Leveling Up: Women's and Newborn Health Research Action Grant** to support previously pilot-tested women's* and newborn's health research projects involving a) screening or diagnostic tools; or b) treatment interventions. These tools/interventions must have proof-of-concept pilot data and be ready to advance to the next stage of empirical testing, or a larger-scale trial, or scale-up, or implementation. The WHRI Leveling Up Grant competition is distinct from the WHRI Catalyst Grant program in that it is intended to fund the next phase in the research discovery pipeline. As such, it is a requirement that the applicant demonstrate how the proposed project represents the "next level". Applications for pilot, proof-of-concept, or preliminary feasibility projects will not be considered and individuals should consider the [WHRI Catalyst Grant](https://whri.org/our-services/womens-health-research-institute-catalyst-grants/) program (<https://whri.org/our-services/womens-health-research-institute-catalyst-grants/>).

Quality improvement (QI) and Quality assurance (QA) projects will not be considered for this competition. However, QI/QA projects are eligible to apply to the [WHRI Catalyst Grant program](#) if the QI/QA project presents a clear research question to be tested.

This competition is made possible thanks to dedicated funding provided by the BC Women's Health Foundation.

Funds Available

One award, valued at \$100,000, for a two-year period. Recipients can apply for a no-cost extension should the project not be able to be completed within the two-year period.

Applicant Eligibility

The Leveling Up: Women's and Newborn Health Research Action Grant is intended to support researchers in British Columbia engaged in research relevant to women's and newborn's health, including past recipients of WHRI Catalyst Grants.

* We define women's health as encompassing both sex-specific conditions, sex differences across conditions, and gendered experiences affecting cis and trans women, and gender diverse people assigned female at birth.^{1,2}

At the time of application:

- The Principal Applicant must be a resident of BC.
- The Principal Applicant must be a member of the WHRI.
- Principal Applicants must be a researcher and/or clinician (which includes those who hold a license to practice as a member of a regulated health profession as recognized by the BC Health Professions Act or who belong to a health profession requiring board certification and are in good standing with the relevant body), must have completed a post-graduate degree (PhD or MD), and cannot be enrolled as a student in a degree or diploma program. It is expected that applicants will have appropriate training and experience in conducting research.
- The funds must be used for a single project that is not already funded from other sources. If the proposed project is related to, or has a direct connection to, an already funded project, it must be demonstrated that the proposed project addresses a novel and distinct question from the funded project and the budget of the proposed project should demonstrate the other source of funding for the project and how the current funding is distinct. Alternatively, if the recipient receives another grant for the same project after being awarded the Leveling Up Grant funding, it is our expectation that the Principal Applicant will notify the Executive Director of the WHRI and that one of those grants must be declined. The PI cannot hold two separate grants funding the same project.
- An individual cannot submit more than one application as Principal Applicant. However, a Principal Applicant can be named as a co-investigator on additional applications.
- Applicants to the leveling up competition may not hold a Catalyst Grant as a PI in the past three cycles, including the current Catalyst Grant competition.

Additionally:

If the Principal Applicant is an Academic Researcher, they must:

- Have a PhD, MD or equivalent, and commit a majority of their time to conducting research.
- Hold an appointment at, or have a commitment for an appointment that will begin by the award start date of December 1, 2026, at a BC institution that must allow the applicant to:
 - a. Apply for and hold peer-reviewed funds as a Principal Investigator.
 - b. Publish their research results.
- Conduct research in one of the four themes of health research as defined by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research: biomedical, clinical, health services, and population health.

If the Principal Applicant is a Clinician Investigator, they must:

- Hold a valid license to practice as a member of a regulated health profession as recognized by the BC Health Professions Act or belong to a health profession requiring board certification and be in good standing with the relevant body.
- Be actively and directly involved in patient care for at least 50% of their role and hold a role which includes making clinical judgements/decisions.
- Have a level of research experience appropriate for the proposed study and have the

resources and infrastructure to carry out the proposed research activities.

Eligible Expenses

Research awards may be used for the following purposes:

- Operating expenses associated with the conduct of the study
- Research project materials and supplies
- Salary support for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, research assistants and staff providing services to support the research activity (maximum of 50% of total budget)
- Release time to enable practitioners and/or researchers to conduct research activities (maximum of 50% of total budget)
- Statistician and data analyst services
- Database development for data collection
- Teleconference, meeting, knowledge translation and conference travel expenses
- Funding for equipment is discouraged. However, if the equipment is necessary for an identified project, it may be considered.

Project Time Period

The time frame for the project is 24 months. Recipients can apply for a no-cost extension should the project not be able to be completed within the two-year time frame.

Communication Requirements

Leveling Up: Women's and Newborn Health Research Action Grant recipients are required to acknowledge the Women's Health Research Institute as well as the BC Women's Health Foundation in any and all communication, presentation, or publication related to the project.

Recipients are also expected to provide an academic report, a lay summary and three plain language key messages from the research project to the WHRI at the completion of the project.

Recipients are asked to present their findings at any of the following events: BC Women's Research Rounds, WHRI Public Forum, BC Women's Health Foundation 'Meet the Researcher' events.

Recipients must agree to serve as a reviewer on future WHRI grant competitions (e.g., Catalyst or Leveling Up grant competitions).

Review Process

A peer review committee will evaluate the full application for all complete eligible submissions.

Evaluation Criteria

The Leveling Up Grant competition is distinct from the WHRI Catalyst Grant program in that it is intended to fund pilot-tested women's and newborn's health research projects involving a) screening or diagnostic tools; or b) treatment interventions. These tools/interventions must have proof-of-concept pilot data and be ready to advance to the next stage of empirical testing, or a larger-scale trial, or scale-up, or implementation. As such, it is a requirement that the applicant demonstrate how

the proposed project represents the “next level”.

General review criteria will include whether:

- The research focus is innovative and relevant to women's and/or newborn's health.
- The plans and objectives of the research activities are clear and well justified.
- The investigators comprise sufficient expertise relevant to the proposed research project.
- There is sufficient justification provided, with accompanying proof-of-concept pilot data, to demonstrate the target tool/intervention is ready to advance to the next stage of research.
- The proposed activities contribute to the training of research trainees, students and other personnel (HQP) engaged in research.
- The proposed activities can be achieved within the funding period. Please note that recipients can apply for a no-cost extension should the project not be completed within the funding period.
- The budget items requested are appropriate and sufficiently justified.
- The plan for dissemination of findings is well constructed.
- The proposed activities integrate [equity, diversity and inclusion \(EDI\)](https://research.ubc.ca/vpri-competitions-initiatives/edi-resources-researchers) (<https://research.ubc.ca/vpri-competitions-initiatives/edi-resources-researchers>) considerations into the research design and into the research and training environment.
- The Principal Applicant has completed the LOI and fulfilled the requirements specified in “How to Apply”.

How to Apply

The application process for this funding opportunity consists of a letter of intent and full application. It is the responsibility of the applicants to ensure that their letter of intent and application is complete prior to submission.

1) Letter of Intent

Applications that fail to submit a letter of intent by the deadline will not be eligible for funding. The Letter of Intent should include the following information:

- i. Information for Principal Applicant and Co-Investigators (if any). Provide the name, title, name of institutional affiliations and email address. **Please note that the list of co-investigators should not change (i.e., no new additions) between the LOI and the full application submission.** Conflict of interest declarations for grant reviewer assignments are based on the project team members listed in the LOI submission.
- ii. Contact information for Project Contact, if different from Principal Applicant.
- iii. Project title.
- iv. Abstract (maximum length of 250 words).
- v. Provide a brief overview of the proof-of-concept or pilot study from which the current application is derived and provide a justification as to why the target tool/intervention is ready to advance to the next stage of research (maximum length of 500 words).
- vi. Indicate if your application represents a previously funded WHRI Catalyst grant project or if it

represents another (i.e., non-Catalyst grant funded) pilot-tested women's and/or newborn's health research project. Note that past funding for your pilot or proof-of-concept project will not impact the evaluation of the present application.

vii. Keywords.

The LOI is due on September 4, 2026 **at 11 PM** PDT. It must be submitted using the following link:
<https://rc.bcchr.ca/redcap/surveys/?s=MJFTMXFTKPFHP8LF>

Please note: You will not be able to save the LOI in the online submission system once it has been started, so please ensure you can complete the LOI submission in a single sitting.

2) Full Application

On September 14, 2026, an email invitation to submit a full application will be sent to each Principal Applicant who meets the eligibility criteria, which will allow them to upload and submit the full application in pdf format. Each applicant will receive a unique link to upload their full application, and this link will only be able to be used to upload a single application. If someone (i.e., a primary contact) is submitting more than one application (i.e., on behalf of more than one Principal Applicant), please ensure that each application is submitted via its own unique link (which is provided in the email invitation to submit a full application) or this will cause an application to be overwritten/replaced in the submission portal.

Please note that for Principal Applicants with a UBC affiliation, a [UBC Research Project Information Form](https://research.ubc.ca/support-researchers/research-project-information-form) (RPIF) (<https://research.ubc.ca/support-researchers/research-project-information-form>) will **not** need to be completed at the time of application submission. Instead, an RPIF will be required only for funded applications at the time funding notifications are received

The full application is due on **October 7, 2026 at 11pm** PDT. No late submissions will be accepted under any circumstances.

Format

Proposals must be written in Arial font (regular) minimum 11pt. Single-spaced text with 2 cm margins on letter size (8½ x 11" (21.2 x 27.5 cm) and saved as a pdf. **Note:** the application file name should be the last name of the principal applicant ('lastname.pdf').

A) Cover sheet (Up to 1 page)

- i. Contact information for Principal Applicant and Co-Investigators (if any). Provide the name, title, name of institution, department name, mailing address, phone number and email address for each investigator
- ii. Contact information for Project Contact, if different from Principal Applicant
- iii. Indicate if your application represents a previously funded WHRI Catalyst grant project or if it represents another (i.e., non-Catalyst grant funded) pilot-tested women's and/or newborn's health research project. Note that both Catalyst grant funded and non-Catalyst grant funded projects are eligible to apply.
- iv. Contact information for the financial administrator, including email address and phone number

- v. Information on host institution: The host institution is most commonly a publicly-funded BC health research institution or university responsible for administering award funds
- vi. Project title / Team name
- vii. Expected duration of the project, including anticipated start and end dates
- viii. Total budget amount
- ix. Lay summary with title (maximum length of 250 words)

B) Proposal (4 pages)

The proposal should include a clear, concise description of the research plan that includes:

- i. Overall objectives
- ii. Rationale for the study (Including background)
- iii. Presents proof-of-concept pilot data for the target screening or diagnostic tool or treatment intervention and provides justification that the tool/treatment is ready to advance to the next stage of empirical testing, or a larger-scale trial, or scale-up, or implementation.
- iv. Study hypothesis and aims
- v. Study design, methodology and analysis plan
- vi. Anticipated results
- vii. Study timeline

C) Appendix (2 pages maximum)

- i. Dissemination or knowledge translation plan. In this section, please address the following points:
 - Describe the Knowledge Translation goal(s) of the project (e.g. to generate awareness, to inform future research).
 - List your knowledge users or target audience (e.g. clinicians, decision makers, patient partners).
 - Name the KT strategies you will employ to achieve your KT goals (e.g. presentations to specific knowledge user groups, engagement of knowledge users within the project team, create a plain-language social media toolkit of findings).
- ii. Future goals outlining how the Leveling Up grant is key to the next stage of your research (including whether it will inform future funding applications, a policy or practice change, or other tangible outcome).
- iii. Inclusion of highly qualified personnel (HQP). Briefly describe how research trainees, students and/or other HQP will be included in the project.
- iv. Consideration of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). In this section, please describe how EDI considerations will be incorporated into the proposed activities, including in your recruitment (e.g., participants, trainees/employees), training of highly qualified personnel (HQP), experimental design and dissemination of project findings (as appropriate).

D) References (5 pages maximum)

E) Budget and Justification (1 page maximum)

Note that the Leveling Up Competition is exempt from the application of indirect costs of research.

F) Amounts and sources of other research funding (excluding salary funding), for the Principal Applicant (1 page maximum)

Give titles, brief description, amounts and duration of awards, along with nominated principal investigator and all co-investigators. Indicate percent overlap with the current application. If the list of other research funding for the Principal Applicant exceeds 1 page, please prioritize the funding presented in this list to the largest sources of funding and the sources of funding that are the most relevant to the proposed project (so that this list will fit within the 1-page limit).

G) CV and Letters of Support:

- i. Letter of departmental or institutional support which indicates how the research fits within the department or institution's strategic plan and/or addresses women's or newborn health.
- ii. Letter(s) of support from other organizations involved with the research study, if applicable.
- iii. CVs of Principal Applicant and Co-Investigators in either [CIHR Project Biosketch Application](#) or [CIHR Tri-Agency CV](#) Format. Note that if your research team includes patient partners, community partners, or knowledge users as Co-investigators, a letter of support can be provided in place of a CV or the [CIHR Applicant Profile CV format](#) can be chosen for these team members. If your research team includes international academics, a CV in any format (e.g., NIH Biosketch) can be provided.

Submission Instructions

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Please note: you will not be able to save the LOI in the online submission system once it has been started, so please ensure you can complete the LOI submission in a single sitting.

The full application is due on **October 7, 2026 at 11pm PDT**. A link to the application platform will be emailed on September 14, 2026 to principal applicants who submitted an LOI.

Questions about the application process can be sent to Kathryn Dewar (kdewar@cw.bc.ca).

REFERENCES

1. Partnership for Women's Health Research Canada (PWHR) and Women's Health Research Institute (WHRI). (2024). *Beyond the Binary in Canada Guide. Pathways toward equitable research with people who experience sex and gender-based health inequities*. Partnership for Women's Health Research Canada. <https://pwhr.org>
2. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute of Gender and Health. (2024). *Research Priority Plan 2024-2029: Strengths to Solutions: Advancing Sex and Gender Science for Healthy Futures*. CIHR. <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/35752.html>