

## Centre for Translational Cancer Research: Strategic Plan 2023-2028

### Executive Summary

The Centre for Translational Cancer Research (CTCR), established in October 2010, functions as a collaborative hub, linking researchers and clinicians across disciplines to tackle the multifaceted challenges of cancer. Partnering with key institutions like Western University, London Health Sciences Centre, Lawson Health Research Institute, and others, the CTCR aims to expedite the journey of translating clinical problems to the lab and scientific discoveries from the lab to the clinic in order to improve cancer patient outcomes.

### Vision and Mission

The CTCR envisions a research environment where multi-disciplinary teams work in concert to prevent, detect early, and develop more effective cancer treatments. Our mission is to curate a diverse network of researchers dedicated to transforming scientific knowledge into clinical practices through an academic framework that fosters bi-directional, interdisciplinary translational cancer research.

### Strategic Goals and Actions

Our strategic plan is built upon knowledge and feedback gathered through a comprehensive internal review, a survey of our membership, a virtual member retreat, and interviews with external stakeholders. The resulting Strategic Plan aims to enhance the CTCR's impact through the following key areas:

#### Leadership and Governance

Renew CTCR leadership and governance

Advocate for unified regional leadership in cancer research

Develop systems to track, measure and communicate the impact of citywide cancer research

#### Building Partnerships

Develop a partnership framework to bolster collaboration with existing and new partners

Establish a sustainable and impactful role for CTCR as a preferred partner in cancer research

#### Supporting Translational Research Groups

Foster impactful translational cancer research by supporting existing and emerging groups

Increase visibility of research activities through educational content and communications

#### Enhancing Member Engagement

Support social platforms, events and initiatives to promote participation and collaboration

Integrate trainees into the CTCR community

Emphasize the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion in all CTCR initiatives

#### Creating Patient-Centric Research Opportunities

Bridge researchers and patients to incorporate patient perspectives into research priorities and connect patients as research partners

#### Enhancing CTCR's value and visibility

Promote CTCR's vision proactively and maximize impact by showcasing CTCR's strengths

### Conclusion

By focusing on these strategic outcomes and initiatives during our next cycle 2023-2028, we will accelerate the translation of research findings to clinical practice, promote collaborative innovation, and

ultimately reduce the burden of cancer in London, the surrounding Southwestern Ontario region, and beyond.

## **CTCR Strategic Plan: 2023-2028**

### **Overview**

The Centre for Translational Cancer Research (CTCR), established in October 2010, engages and supports city-wide translational cancer research in London by linking researchers and clinicians from multiple disciplines to address the complexity of cancer as a disease. The CTCR partners with London Health Sciences Centre's London Regional Cancer Program, Lawson Health Research Institute, and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry Department of Oncology/Western University to accelerate the translation of knowledge to clinical practice to benefit cancer patient, including supporting bi-directional interdisciplinary translational cancer research from the bench to bedside and back again.

The vision of the CTCR is focused on fostering collaborative multi-disciplinary teams to prevent cancer, detect cancer earlier, and develop better cancer treatments. The mission of the CTCR is to foster a diverse and growing network of researchers who seek to minimize the burden of cancer.

Since its conception, the CTCR has been focused on five main objectives:

- Facilitate the establishment of multidisciplinary Translational Cancer Research Teams of researchers at Western and partner research institutions and continue to support already formed teams;
- Stimulate and help these teams to pursue novel, creative areas of inquiry ('big ideas') with exciting potential to make major, positive impacts on the lives of people with cancer;
- Break down barriers to their success by integrating infrastructure and other support for emerging teams across multiple faculties, institutes and clinical programs;
- Connect teams with each other to realize translational benefits that transcend specific disease sites or research platforms;
- Through these teams, realize the vision of collectively being a leading program in integrated, interdisciplinary research in personalized cancer care

Our founding translational groups in Breast, Ovarian, Head and Neck and Prostate Cancer have been highly productive and led in the development of the CTCR. For example, within our bibliographic analysis as part of our renewal application in 2023, prostate cancer was the most commonly represented topic, representing the productivity of this translational research group. Similarly, within our Head and Neck research group, the conduct of innovative important clinical trials like ORATOR and ORATOR 2 (comparing radiation versus robotic surgery) have been among our highest impact publications.

Since its origin, three translational groups have been developed in London bringing the total number to seven: The Translational Immuno-Oncology Research Group (TIORG), the Pancreatic Cancer Translational Research Program, and the Metastasis Translational Cancer Research Team and leaders of

these programs are CTCR members. In particular, the CTCR was instrumental in helping launch the TIORG, working with the leaders Drs. Saman Maleki and John Ronald in facilitating successful Western Interdisciplinary Development Initiatives (IDI) in the (total) amount of \$225,000 in the last two years, developing regular research meeting, trainee journal clubs and a recurring annual Symposium attracting international participation. The Metastases Translational Cancer Research Team. This team, led by Drs. Palma and Allan has a strong clinical focus with the conduct of prospective studies examining the role of targeted radiotherapy in treating patients with limited metastatic disease. These trials (i.e. SABR-COMET) have been practice changing within the discipline of radiation oncology and represent some of the most impactful publications from the Centre (see enclosed scholarly publication report). Our latest generation of trials (i.e. SABR-COMET-10) incorporates strong biologic translation components which seek to establish biologic biomarkers that are predictors of patient benefit of this approach. The Pancreatic Translational Cancer Research Program has benefited from strong philanthropic support (creating the Baker Centre for Translational Cancer Research) and has strong linkages to the Verspeeten Genome Center. An exciting project spearheaded through this group is the establishment of a new laboratory facility on the 4th floor of the LRCP/Cancer Research Laboratories which will be devoted to the development of new animal models and cell line models of pancreatic cancer from patient derived tumor specimens.

The CTCR has also created a [website](#) (Centre for Translational Cancer Research - Western University with each translational group having its own webpage. News of funding results, collaborations, events and awards are announced on the website, via social media and to the CTCR members. The Centre's social media account (@WesternU\_CTCR) is very active in the sharing of information amongst its partners, its trainees and its members as to build awareness for cancer research in the city of London. The Centre also publishes a quarterly newsletter, The OnInsider which includes London oncology news, updates, varied publications, etc. (past editions available [here](#)).

The Centre has been actively involved in the organizing of the annual Department of Oncology Research & Education Day in 2021 through to 2023. The event showcases citywide trainees' cancer research in both an oral presentation and poster presentation format. In 2023, the event was held at the Best Western Lamplighter Inn and was attended by over 300 clinicians, researchers and their trainees from various departments.

In late 2022 and early 2023 the CTCR underwent an internal review led by the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry. The review recognized the accomplishments of the CTCR and approved renewal for another 5-year cycle from 2023-2028. In their report, the reviewers identified areas for particular attention for the next cycle:

- Development of a new Strategic Plan for the CTCR;
- Establishment of a budget that aligns with the new Strategic Plan;
- Revitalization of its leadership and governance;
- Stronger integration of EDI principles into CTCR operations;
- Integration of trainees into the CTCR;

- Enhanced advocacy for initiative to enhance translational cancer research

## **CTCR Strategic Plan: 2023-2028**

The Strategic Plan presented here is a culmination of collegial work begun in 2023, by the members of the CTCR, guided by the feedback from the Internal Review. The document is intended to convey the collective, forward-focused vision of the Department and the initiatives that we have committed to undertake over the next 5 years in pursuit of the CTCR's vision. Data has been gathered through a comprehensive internal review, member-wide survey, a virtual member retreat, and interviews with external provincial and national stakeholders including Ontario Institute for Cancer Research (OICR), Terry Fox Research Institute (TFRI) & University Health Network (UHN).

***Vision: To foster collaborative multi-disciplinary teams to prevent cancer, detect cancer earlier and develop better cancer treatments***

***Mission: The Western Centre for Translational Cancer Research is a diverse and growing network of researchers working to minimize the burden of cancer.***

### **Priorities, Strategies and Action Items**



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 = Near term priority (6 month) focus for CTCR director and Management Committee

### **1. Leadership/Governance**

*The leadership of the CTCR, as well as advocating for city-wide leadership, is critical for establishing common goals across London to improve cooperation in translational cancer research. While the CTCR could pursue institute status through Western, the membership felt strongly that there were many other opportunities for CTCR to better increase its visibility, impact, and sustainability within the current Centre organization.*

#### Strategies


- i. Supporting city-wide/regional research leadership and research community participation
  1. **Action:**  Position ourselves as a key resource in the recruitment of the Regional Cancer Research Director through London Health Sciences Research Institute.
  2. **Action:** Revitalize current CTCR leadership through an open and inclusive process of CTCR member engagement that aligns with Western guidelines for Centres
  3. **Action:** Create an advisory board populated by research leaders among key partners in order to ensure CTCR initiatives are congruent with our partners research directions
- ii. Develop systems for supporting operational excellence and impact
  1. **Action:** Through consultation with our management committee and advisory board, identify metrics of research success and impact that can be collected, evaluated and reported to our community and stakeholders.
  2. **Action:** Ensure CTCR is connected with and supports relevant initiatives led by our stakeholders (Hospitals, Research Institutes, University) that promote equity, diversity and inclusion
  3. **Action:** Engage EDI leaders within our partner institutions to ensure CTCR is following best practices in publicizing, engaging and welcoming new CTCR members

### **2. Building partnerships**

*As a virtual network, CTCR relies on partners to help operationalize its vision of impactful translational cancer research. Strong partnerships are essential to the effectiveness and sustainability of the CTCR.*

#### Strategies

- i. Directly engage and develop a partnership framework outlining benefits, expectations, and means for collaboration with hospitals, academic institutions (i.e., Western University), organizations (e.g., OICR, UHN), and other stakeholders

1. **Action:**  Assertively define and promote CTCR's vision by proactively promoting our strategic direction with our partners.
  2. **Action:** Leverage the advisory board with key partners to discuss CTCR's future plans, the benefits of continued partnership and the importance of collaborative investment in CTCR to further facilitate citywide cancer research as part of a rich research ecosystem
  3. **Action:** Identify and engage potential new external partners (e.g. OICR, other academic groups like WE-SPARK, industry) to promote the strengths of our citywide cancer research and identify collaborative opportunities (e.g. theranostics, AI, clinical trials, disease or pathway specific research)
- ii. Develop means to proactively engage current CTCR members and the London research community.
    1. **Action:** Establish new methods (e.g., channels/website/social) or platforms that allow knowledge exchange, resource-sharing, and collaborative research within the citywide cancer research community as well as the broader lay community
  - iii. Organize symposiums, workshops, and research forums to encourage collaboration and innovation
    1. **Action:** Solicit and support Workshop proposals from CTCR members to address topics of interest. Encourage experimentation with new formats to enhance diverse participation among our membership.
    2. **Action:** Seek opportunities to promote our events in ways that raise public awareness regarding our translational cancer research initiatives.

### **3. Supporting Translational Research Groups.**

*The CTCR is built off of many thematic cancer research groups, all of which contribute to prominent translational findings for the city of London and beyond. It is vital to continue supporting these groups to further promote a positive impact on translational cancer research. Additionally, there is an opportunity to more closely link Translational Research Groups to explore joint opportunities through the network function of CTCR.*

#### Strategy:

Support existing and emerging translational cancer research groups

1. **Action:** Identify and bring translational research group leaders together regularly with each other and CTCR leaders for knowledge sharing and ongoing strategy development such as large grant/infrastructure development
2. **Action:** Advocate for and seek funding opportunities for translational research groups, especially those targeted at trainees (i.e. trainee travel awards)

3. **Action:** Leverage CTCR leadership role to advocate on behalf of Translational Research Groups for common research needs (infrastructure, process change etc.)
4. **Action:** Identify emerging research groups and provide administrative support and targeted financial support to nurture their development

#### 4. **Engagement with CTCR Membership**


*The CTCR works in collaboration with several different research members, research staff and trainees; all members are vital to ensuring the continued impact of the CTCR. Hence, maintaining and strengthening these relationships are important to optimize our impact.*

##### Strategies

###### i. Researcher Engagement

1. **Action:** Implement a regular survey to hear from members regarding the impact of CTCR's actions/advocacy, member needs/interests and opportunities for CTCR to improve

###### ii. Focus on new initiatives for trainee engagement by giving trainees their own representation or individual body within the CTCR

1. **Action:**  Recruit trainee members to sit on the CTCR management committee
2. **Action:** Provide administrative or financial support for oncology trainees who want to self-organize into trainee-driven groups; generate interest in CTCR by allowing trainees to organize with like-minded individuals at a similar point in their careers

###### ii. Support innovative training and mentorship for trainees

1. **Action:** Survey existing offerings to understand where CTCR could take a leadership role to catalyze the development of new undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate opportunities in translational cancer research.
2. **Action:** Identify and pursue funding opportunities with partners to support large scale training initiatives (i.e. similar to historical CIHR strategic training program)

###### iii. Support best practices in EDI within our CTCR community

**Action:** Engage EDI leaders within our partner institutions to ensure CTCR is following best practices in publicizing, engaging and welcoming new CTCR members

#### 5. **Creating Patient-Centric Research Opportunities**

*Incorporating the patient perspective into cancer research activities provides bidirectional benefits in terms of informing meaningful cancer research directions and communicating the importance of cancer research to those we aim to help.*

##### Strategy:



Create opportunities to bring cancer researchers and patients together

1. **Action:** Use existing (or develop new) venues and events to inform patients of current translational cancer research initiatives and solicit their input patient priorities in cancer research (for example patient story telling at research symposia)
2. **Action:** Engage with existing patient partnership groups (i.e. LHSC, OICR) to connect researchers with patient partners in the co-design of research projects as collaborators and co-investigators

## 6. **Enhancing CTCR's value and visibility**

*The CTCR has access to many resources and talents and raising awareness of CTCR as an enabler of translational cancer research is integral for maximizing our impact.*

*Strategy:*

Identify and communicate the value of CTCR and what the organization offers to our members, stakeholders and partners.

1. **Action:** Identify, promote and communicate existing CTCR strengths, talents, and resources through multiple venues (website, social media, in person events)
2. **Action:** Ensure our partners are aware of and communicate CTCR strengths among their constituencies
3. **Action:** Promote CTCR's mission and value among our members, ensuring sustained engagement and active participation throughout their membership tenure.
4. **Action:** Create educational content on the CTCR website to disseminate research knowledge by the research group
5. **Action:** Partner with Schulich to highlight core facilities in London aiding cancer research

### **Summary**

The CTCR has been successful in creating and sustaining a network of translational cancer researchers citywide and has added value through information sharing, community education events, targeted support for specific initiatives and engagement of existing and emerging translational research groups.

This document aimed to provide the CTCR's strategic outcomes and tactics for the next five years. This includes identifying and communicating the CTCR's potential, resources and partnerships, improving the support for translational research groups, promoting collaborative innovation with research partners, strengthening the membership within the CTCR, establishing leadership and governance, and developing EDI initiatives.

This document will inform the work of the Director and Management Committee over the current Centre cycle (2023-2028) and will undergo regular review to ensure concrete progress is being made against the goals outlined.

These outcomes and tactics will reinforce the CTCR's pursuit of accelerating basic research findings to clinical practice and bi-directional interdisciplinary translational cancer research, ultimately lessening the burden of cancer citywide and beyond.