

**Weill Cornell
Medicine**

Children's Health Council

Impact Report

July 2022



Table of Contents

Letter From Our Chair	1
Children's Health Council by the Numbers	2-3
Children's Health Investigators Fund Recipients (CHIF)	4
The Power of Philanthropic Support: CHIF	5
Donor Spotlight: The Bernstein Family	6-7
We're Changing Medicine	8
All-Member Meeting 2022	9



From left: Christina Truesdale, Mara Feil, Lori Freedman and Casey Weiss

Letter From Our Chair

Dear Friends,

As my time as chair of the Children's Health Council comes to an end, I have been reflecting on an incredible six years. It has been remarkable seeing this dedicated group grow from a handful of families with a deep passion for children's health research to a thriving group of 61 – and growing!



I want to express my gratitude to every member for your commitment to the Council. It has been an honor to chair a group that has made such impressive strides since its inception: supporting 14 early-career scientists with the Children's Health Investigators Fund, holding more than 30 events to inspire and reach community members, and raising millions to advance groundbreaking research and educate the next generation of pediatric physicians and scientists. In fact, this year, Council members collectively donated over \$5 million to support children's health research, education and care, which is our highest fundraising total to date! We have broken our own record for three years in a row and this outstanding upward trajectory is all thanks to you!

This June, as I ended my second three-year term as chair, my friends Mara Feil, vice chair of membership, and Casey Weiss, vice chair of programming, finished their second three-year terms as well. I am so proud of the work they've accomplished and am delighted that Casey Weiss will assume the role of Children's Health Council chair. She will be joined by Alison Bernstein, vice chair of membership, and Erika Feil-Lincoln, vice chair of programming. Alison and Erika have been steadfast members of the Council's Executive Committee, and I look forward to seeing all they accomplish in their new roles.

In addition to new leadership, we have a lot to look forward to this coming year, including the continued success of the *We're Changing Medicine* campaign, which boasts Children's Health as a priority area and is driving research breakthroughs and recruiting the top pediatric physician-scientists to Weill Cornell Medicine.

I hope you'll be proud of the accomplishments you see throughout these pages and proud to be an integral part of changing medicine for children everywhere. We look forward to the year ahead!

Christina Truesdale
Chair, Children's Health Council

By the Numbers

Total member households:

61



Areas funded:

Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Cardiology
Emergency Medicine
Endocrinology
Gastroenterology and Nutrition
Hematology/Oncology

Neurology and Neurosurgery
Newborn Medicine
Otolaryngology
Pulmonology
Surgery



As of June 15, 2022

Total CHC Funds Raised
from 2014-2022:

\$18,041,045

Fundraising FY 2022

Children's Health Investigators Fund

\$171,100

Other Children's Health Funds

\$4,887,000

Total Raised

\$5,058,100

Children's Health Investigators Fund Recipients

The Children's Health Investigators Fund is a vital source of support for early-career scientists, providing the funds needed for Weill Cornell Medicine pediatric investigators to establish promising preliminary results and then qualify for large-scale federal grants. In July 2021, \$172,200 from the Investigators Fund was distributed to support the exciting research projects outlined below.



Jennifer Bress, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry

Dr. Jennifer Bress is a clinical psychologist and researcher who focuses on treating depression and anxiety across the lifespan. With support from the Children's Health Investigators Fund, she launched the first randomized study of the Maya app, a mobile app designed to deliver cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to youth with depression and anxiety. This study compares three different incentive strategies and assesses the extent to which each strategy helps youth engage with the Maya app and improves their symptoms. Initial analyses show both depression and anxiety symptoms decrease by approximately 50% after six weeks of using the Maya app, and that these improvements are maintained

six weeks after the end of the intervention. The app team is now preparing to conduct a new study that will compare the current version of the Maya app with personalized versions tailored for youth with specific symptom profiles.

The Investigators Fund has been critical to Dr. Bress' ability to conduct this research, and she will use the data to support an NIH R01 application that will bring the Maya app to a larger patient base. Dr. Bress is immensely grateful for the support of generous CHC donors, which enables her to conduct research that will be instrumental in providing innovative, accessible and personalized mental health interventions to youth.



Emily Wasserman, M.D.

Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics

Dr. Emily Wasserman is a pediatric critical care specialist with expertise in caring for children with respiratory viruses, bronchiolitis and asthma. Her research aims to better understand how respiratory viruses drive critical illness in children. The COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of multi-system inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) presented an urgent need for Dr. Wasserman to leverage her expertise and drive critical research on disease pathogenesis. The Children's Health Investigators Fund provided protected time for her to serve as a co-principal investigator on PRISM, a national, multi-site study funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) and directed by Dr. Virginia

Pascual of Weill Cornell Medicine's Drukier Institute. Dr. Wasserman enrolled 244 children with COVID-19 in the PRISM study across Weill Cornell Medicine sites in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. Study participants were followed during their acute illness and at intervals after recovery. Tissue samples were collected, building a robust database that will be the foundation for further research to study important questions surrounding MIS-C and help inform treatment and care for countless children.

Dr. Wasserman is incredibly grateful for the support of the Children's Health Investigators Fund, without which she would not have been able to build this database that will be a crucial tool for clinical research, helping investigators unravel the many questions that remain about COVID-19 in children.

The Power of Philanthropic Support for Research: Children's Health Investigators Fund

Since its inception in 2015, the Children's Health Investigators Fund has supported 14 early-career investigators at Weill Cornell Medicine in their research efforts. These scientists have seen tremendous success, publishing dozens of scientific studies and making breakthrough strides in their respective children's health fields. These recipients, many of whom have attributed some of their success to the support and generosity of the Children's Health Council, have received a total of eight internal and external research awards, totaling nearly \$1.2 million.

One of these CHIF-funded investigators who has seen remarkable success over the past few years is Dr. Perdita Permaul, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics in the Division of Pediatric Pulmonology, Allergy and Immunology, and the Caryl and Israel A. Englander Clinical Scholar in Children's Health, who was appointed Director of Pediatric Research at NewYork-Presbyterian Queens in August 2021. She reflected on some of this success and her gratitude toward the CHIF program and the Council here.



Dr. Perdita Permaul at Family Science Day with her children

How did CHIF funds help advance your research?

Dr. Permaul: CHIF funding has been instrumental in supporting early-stage investigators such as myself with salary support, research supplies and staffing, and the protected time desperately needed to carry out these important pediatric studies to ultimately advance the health of our children. These studies made me a competitive applicant for numerous internal and external grants.

Can you tell us about the success you've seen since receiving CHIF funding in 2018?

Dr. Permaul: I was honored to be named the Caryl and Israel A. Englander Clinical Scholar in Children's Health in 2020 and received a Department of Pediatrics Junior Faculty Pilot Research Award to study the effect of obesity on respiratory tract infections, immune responses and asthma morbidity in children. From 2020 to 2022, I was awarded an NIH/NIAID Pediatric Research Loan Repayment Program Grant award to further support my research career development.

I successfully established a multi-site asthma cohort and biorepository which now includes samples from over 180 children and was recently awarded an NIH/NIAID funded subcontract with the Frederick National Laboratory for Cancer Research.

Is there a message you'd like to give to CHC members who support the Investigators Fund?

Dr. Permaul: I am very thankful for the generous support from the members of the Children's Health Council. As a "physician mom," the CHC has reduced some of the stress of acquiring the time and funding to pursue my heart's passion of healing children with asthma and allergies and other immune-mediated diseases.

What research are you currently working on?

Dr. Permaul: Through an NIH/NIAID clinical research grant my work is focused on determining whether there are observable and biological differences between obese and non-obese urban children with asthma. I'm studying the interaction of body mass index (BMI), environmental exposures and asthma morbidity. Through another NIH/NIAID-funded pilot study I am focusing on demonstrating the value of immunologic and epidemiologic observation for future emerging pathogens that will drive the development of future diagnostic, therapeutic and preventative tools.



Donor Spotlight: Ali and Jay Bernstein

Children’s Health Council members Alison (Ali) and Jay Bernstein are stepping up to combat the current children’s mental health crisis through a generous gift that will support Dr. Cori Green and the establishment of the Collaborative Care Pilot Program. Dr. Green, pediatrician and director of Behavioral Health Education and Integration, will partner with the Department of Psychiatry to launch the program which includes fully incorporating mental health providers as instructors at clinic sites, where they will serve as role models, and advise and consult on pediatric patients. This program will allow Weill Cornell Medicine to develop a collaborative care model that will change the way we provide mental health care for children.

“Everywhere you turn, multiple news sources have been reporting an alarming number of children with anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders,” says Ali. “Establishing this type of program to educate pediatricians to be proactive in mental health care is a

huge opportunity for communities, especially in under-resourced areas. Children’s health care in general is a priority for us. We saw a specific need and we are glad to be able to help.”

“We have four children and whenever we hear there’s a need to help with children’s health care, that resonates with us,” says Jay. “Specifically, we’ve been hearing about the challenges of late to the mental health of children, which is an area that often comes with stigmas. We need a different type of outreach to reach children who are suffering. We want to be part of the solution.”

Through the Collaborative Care Pilot Program, Dr. Green is training general pediatricians to incorporate mental health screening and treatment into routine primary care. Additionally, the program provides dedicated mental health specialists, including a child psychiatrist, psychologist or psychiatric social worker, at Weill Cornell Medicine’s pediatric primary care clinic.



“It’s imperative that we develop new models of care both to train pediatricians and to increase access to care for patients”

“We need to see mental health through a prevention lens. It’s imperative that we develop new models of care both to train pediatricians and to increase access to care for patients in order to address this mental health crisis head on,” says Dr. Green, who established a three-year curriculum where pediatric residents work side by side with mental health specialists using active learning strategies such as risk assessments and safety planning that will better prepare these future pediatricians.

This program supports the intersection of children’s health and brain health, which are among key areas of investment for Weill Cornell Medicine’s ambitious \$1.5 billion *We’re Changing Medicine* campaign.

“We are putting children’s health at the forefront of this campaign and the advancement of medicine,” says Dr. Sallie Permar, chair of the Department of Pediatrics and the Nancy C. Paduano Professor in Pediatrics. “We recognize that to give a child a healthy start to life includes an integrated focus on both physical and mental health.”

Dr. Francis Lee, chair of the Department of Psychiatry, which will partner on this program, echoes these sentiments. “Weill Cornell Medicine leads the way in collaborative health care, and this program is a perfect example of how an organized team of scientists and physicians can come together to improve the lives of our youngest patients by incorporating vital mental health care into standard practices.”

Ali and Jay have been members of the Children’s Health Council since 2019 and on July 1, Ali became the next vice chair of membership for the Council.

“The Children’s Health Council is an impressive community of people who have been so welcoming,” says Ali. “I look forward to helping this group grow to its next level and continuing to build our community within the Council.”

“The Council is looking for unique and fresh ways to support children’s health and investing in researchers who are dedicated to solving complicated problems,” says Jay. “By being part of the Council, we’re supporting an effort of top-notch professionals and a great group of people who are making a difference.”



Dr. Cori Green

The innovations developed at Weill Cornell Medicine through the Children’s Health Council’s efforts and the Collaborative Care Pilot Program could provide a blueprint for early mental health care for children, which could expand to benefit children and families across the country.

“It’s a localized effort right now, but we hope it’s something that can grow beyond Dr. Green’s initiative,” says Jay.

“I think every little bit of progress helps; any level of impact is something that we are thrilled with. We hope this program will generate greater awareness for pediatric mental health care at an earlier age and change the way doctors and even teachers look at children,” says Ali. “A community can have an enormous impact upon a child and this program will help ensure a child’s wellbeing. Children are critical to our future and their health is of utmost importance. Jay and I are excited to help Weill Cornell Medicine change medicine for them.”

Changing the Future of Children's Health

Weill Cornell Medicine's *We're Changing Medicine* campaign is making critical investments across the institution, helping us continue to care for the whole patient and their whole family for their whole life; bring together visionary scientists and clinicians to make revolutionary breakthroughs; and train medicine's future leaders.



Children's Health is a key priority area of the campaign. Our committed friends and donors like the Children's Health Council are providing crucial support that is helping us expand our pediatric research facilities, recruit talented pediatric clinicians and researchers and advance training programs to support and mentor our faculty and staff. With our teams of world-class researchers, we are seeking health care solutions specifically for children and together, we are discovering ways to cure pediatric illnesses and invest in initiatives that focus on lifesaving solutions and community education. Below are two highlights of how we're changing the future of children's health:

Notable Recruitment: Dr. Patrick Wilson



Dr. Patrick Wilson

Recruiting talented pediatric clinicians and investigators who will enhance existing programs or launch new avenues of research is a key aim of the *We're Changing Medicine* campaign. A commitment from Board Fellow Barry Wolf and Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP made it possible for the Drukier Institute for Children's Health to recruit senior investigator Dr. Patrick Wilson, a professor of medicine from the University of Chicago. Dr. Wilson studies B cell biology and antibodies and is notable for his expertise in flu vaccine development. Dr. Wilson's most recent work toward the development of a universal influenza vaccine was published in December 2021 in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature*.

Dr. Wilson's exemplary contributions to the field will invigorate our immunology and virology programs and enhance our ability to apply for large NIH-funded projects. His breadth of experience makes him an invaluable mentor for up-and-coming scientists.

Physician-Scientist Training Program Launched in 2021

Physician-scientist development is a long and multi-faceted process that requires extensive mentoring and guidance throughout an investigator's career. Early training and achievements in research during clinical training periods of residency and fellowship lay a strong foundation for an investigative career that seeks to solve major health challenges for children. Creating such pathways for trainees to become research scientists is an essential step forward for our institution and a critical aim of the *We're Changing Medicine* campaign.

Thanks to a generous commitment from Board Fellow and CHC leader Ronay Menschel and Richard Menschel, Dr. Sallie Permar launched the Physician-Scientist Training Program (PSTP) in August 2021. The new program is directed by Dr. David Lyden, the Stavros S. Niarchos Professor in Pediatric Cardiology and a professor of pediatrics and of cell and developmental biology. Through the program, pediatric residents will spend one year training in rigorous and well-designed basic and translational research under the guidance of exceptional faculty mentors. In its first year, the program garnered a robust pool of 72 applicants who graduated from top-tier medical schools. Two M.D./Ph.D. candidates have been selected and will begin the program in fall 2022.



Ronay Menschel

Children's Health Council All-Member Meeting May 2022



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