

PROGRESS REPORT

The University of Ottawa LIFE Research Institute From 0 to 5 years



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Word from the director

It has been an immense pleasure for me to be the founding director of the University of Ottawa LIFE Research Institute. I cannot find a better way to bring together the wonderful know-how and expertise of this university's researchers and students to address real complex problems of everyday people in everyday lives as they grow older.

I am a firm believer that this Institute belongs to the entire university. In this report, I focus on its first five years, which has been on building the governance structure and exploring ways to capture the added value of bringing together members from such varied backgrounds. The input from outside stakeholders has been key to making our work relevant and I am proud of what our team was able to achieve. It was unfortunate that the COVID-19 pandemic hit just a few months after my mandate began. This made face-to-face meetings impossible which meant that members were challenged to find ways to get to know each other and form solid interdisciplinary teams, as they dealt with the impact of the pandemic on their own personal challenges.

As the LIFE Research Institute moves forward, I hope we will all be reminded that **Ageing is not part of LIFE, it is LIFE!** Ageing begins before birth and is our response to the multitude of factors and influences faced throughout our life trajectories. This simply cannot be understood through the work of a single researcher or a single discipline. If we are truly engaged to help real people live real lives in real societies, we must understand and innovate by working together. This has been the driving force of the LIFE Research Institute (LRI) since its inception.

I hope you enjoy reading how it all began and how this 5-year-old is now ready to be launched into the next phase of its own LIFE. The purpose of this report is to tell our story. Please feel free to brag about us, support us or become a member. Visit our [website](#) and contribute to the institute however you can.



Linda J Garcia, PhD

Professor and Founding Director
of the University of Ottawa LIFE
Research Institute

Conception to Birth

The idea of the LIFE Research Institute was born in the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Health Sciences, under the stewardship of Dean H  l  ne Perrault. Interested in developing major structural projects that could regroup several professors from five distinct schools in the faculty, Dean Perrault proposed we look at ageing as an area of focus. The decision was motivated by the research interests of the professorate but also by the recognition that the world population was ageing and in need of solutions to complex problems. A research institute seemed like the answer to bring researchers together and to exchange knowledge through collaborations, teaching and innovative knowledge mobilization initiatives. Realizing that there were several major initiatives in Canadian universities targeting older adults, the team embarked on an external consultation with both Canadian and international experts.

One message that was clear from this external advice was that any future institute interested in ageing should engage in true interdisciplinary ventures in its largest sense. The belief was that health science researchers working tightly with

disparately different disciplines outside of the realm of health conditions would not only contribute to society's understanding of the impact of well-being, or conversely chronic and acute disease, on daily life, but would dispel ageist conceptions that ageing is synonymous with disease and ill health. The consultants stressed the need to address the very complexity of the ageing process. As institutes focus on specific themes, some related to diseases (e.g. dementia), our consultants encouraged us to address the symbiotic relationship of the different factors that contribute to that complexity head-on. It was indeed time to boil the ocean as it were. Furthermore, since the factors influencing the ageing experience are context and time sensitive, there was a recommendation that our institute study ageing as it changes over time, throughout the life trajectory.

At the same time as we were forming the vision for the LRI, Ms Margaret Gillis, past public health executive at the Government of Canada, was looking for a university partner to launch the Canadian arm of the [International Longevity Centres \(ILC\)](#). [ILC-Canada](#) is an independent think tank that

“proposes ideas and guidance for policies addressing population aging based on international and domestic research and practice with a view to bettering the lives of Canadians”. Working within a global alliance with 15 other countries, ILC-Canada was an instrumental partner in the birth of the LIFE Research Institute.



Armed with feedback from outside consultants about the relevance of the LIFE Research Institute, we embarked on an internal validation process, seeking advice and potential areas of collaboration. After engaging in discussions with deans and vice-deans of research of all 10 University of Ottawa faculties, a call to membership was made in 2016 and yielded an interest from at least 65 members from across the university. We knew then that the engagement of members from other faculties was a real possibility and that it was worth creating an institute where all could meet and engage in interdisciplinary initiatives. To kick off this concept we partnered with ILC-Canada to organize a hugely successful discussion forum in May 2016 on Age-friendly business, hosting community and business stakeholders with uOttawa researchers. [The report can be found on the LIFE Research Institute's webpage.](#)

The interest expressed at this event for such interdisciplinary collaborations convinced us that the Institute was ready to be launched. The documents to officially create the University of Ottawa LIFE Research Institute were submitted to the Office of the Vice-President of Research and Innovation in early 2018. As we waited for a verdict from the OVPRI, a second forum was organized, again in partnership with ILC-Canada. Building on its success, the Age-friendly societies forum entitled “[Towards a World Adapted for Older Adults: Maintaining Quality of Life](#)” was held in the spring of 2018 and was again, a huge success.

Accepted by the OVPRI, Professor Linda Garcia of the Faculty of Health Sciences and member of the ad hoc committee, was named its founding director for a mandate from 2019- 2023. The University of Ottawa LIFE Research Institute was born.



Infancy: getting to know who we are

Once the green light had been given for the creation of the LRI, an ad hoc group which later formed the first Steering Committee, created a vision, mission, and value statement. Our intention was to stay as true to the advice of our external consultants as possible.

Vision

To act as a leading innovative research hub for understanding and integrating biological, psychosocial and environmental dimensions of life trajectories with the view to foster optimal wellbeing throughout the lifespan. **We want to inspire individuals to live the longest, best lives possible honouring the many varied choices along the way.**

Mission

The LIFE Research Institute assembles researchers and partners with diverse perspectives who work collaboratively to understand how we are guided along the unexpected trajectories of life.



We expect this knowledge will transform how we view the roles for individuals and society in ageing and create new opportunities for life fulfillment and well-being. We use multi-sectorial expertise to advance knowledge and training on issues related to individuals' realignment to changing biological, physical, mental and social environments throughout the life cycle.

Values

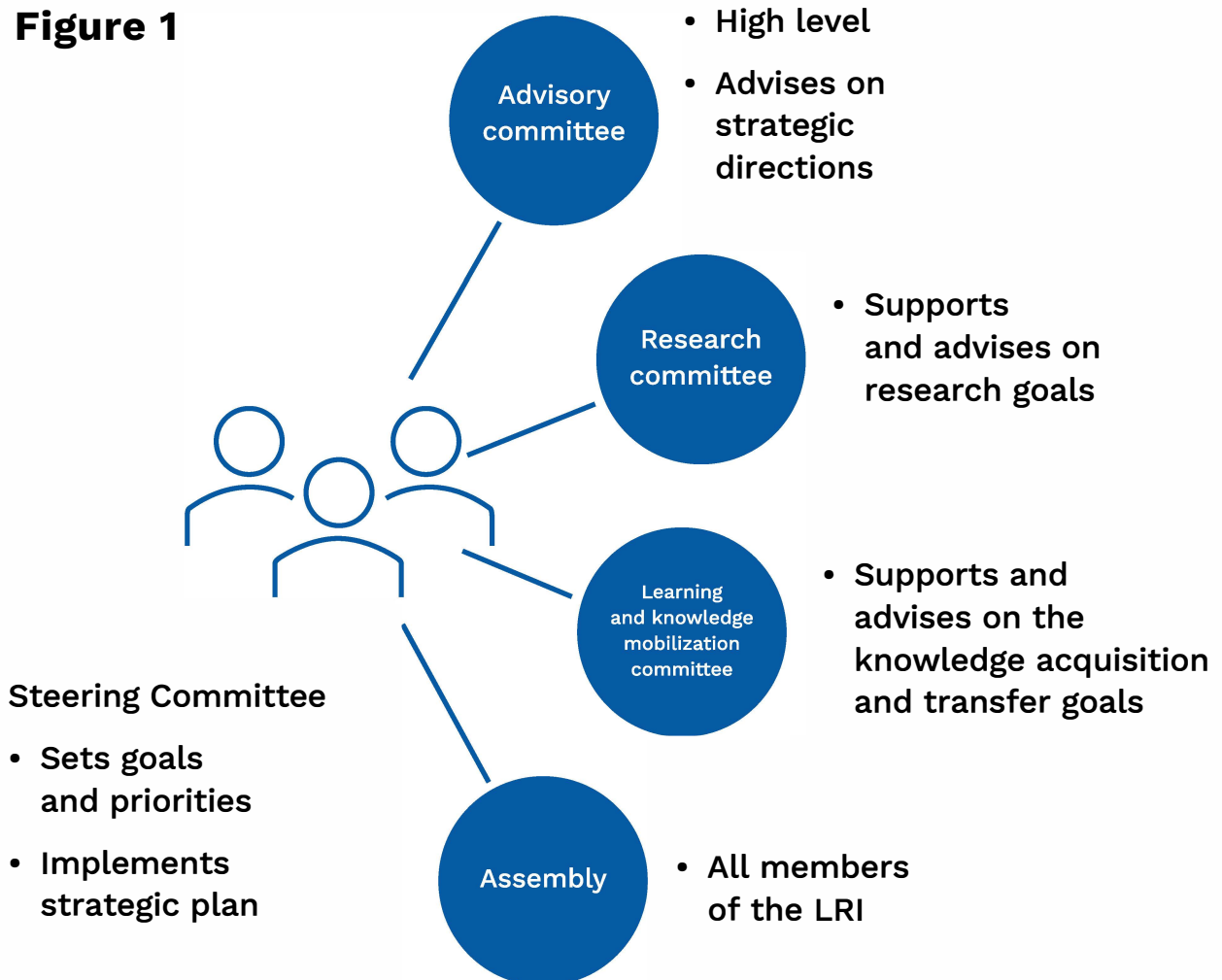
1. The LRI embraces the **concepts** of living long, living well, and doing so with choices. These form the backbone to its activities.
2. The LRI values true **interdisciplinary** work that creates innovative thinking and solutions that would not be possible through the actions of a single discipline.
3. The LRI favors world-class interdisciplinary research on life trajectories and aging and on **the integrative processes of adaptation** over a person's lifespan.
4. The LRI values meaningful **interactions with stakeholders** from all sectors. It values embedding knowledge into lifelong learning initiatives that include students, practitioners, policymakers, members of civil society as well as highly qualified personnel to foster interdisciplinary experiential learning environments for students.
5. The LRI fosters **innovative learning methods** throughout the lifespan by partnering with communities and businesses.
6. The LRI attaches great importance in initiatives that **impact real world problems**. It attaches great importance to the use of research and data to impact policy, shape decisions on practice settings, and entrepreneurial initiatives regarding ageing and wellbeing.
7. The LRI values what happens to us in older life but appreciates the **contributions of earlier life trajectories** in determining that older life experience.
8. The LRI is committed to conducting its business in both **French and English** and adheres to the University of Ottawa language policies.
9. The LRI upholds approaches that are **inclusive of all individuals** regardless of age, race, ethnicity, or gender choice.

Learning to walk and talk

The ad hoc committee knew that the LIFE Research Institute had the potential to be quite sizable. Given that it was attracting members from 9 of our 10 faculties, it needed a governance structure that would sustain such a disparate group of academics, students and partners to come together to make decisions that sustained its vision and mission.

We needed to build a structure that valued not only the successes of individual members but especially the successes of the teams the LRI supported and created. Network structures similar to the Thematic Research Networks supported the FRQS (Fonds de recherche du Québec en santé) and the key performance indicators associated with such networks proved to be a good starting point. The LRI needed a decisional body which could use the input from academics, students and community members. Figure 1 summarizes the result of those reflections.



Figure 1

During its first five years, the LRI was governed through a decisional Steering Committee, receiving input from members of different faculties, students and community members working through four consultative committees (Figure 1). In the subsequent paragraphs, the reader of this report will appreciate the interfaculty representation on each of these committees as well as the inclusion of students and, at times, community members. The [LIFE Research Institute Charter](#) was created in its first year.

The LRI is supported by a full-time position shared between an executive administrative assistant, Ms Linda Caron (30 hours per week) and a part-time (7.5 hours a week) Social Media expert. Students are also regularly employed through the University of Ottawa Work-Study Program to help with administrative tasks.

Steering committee – making decisions

All decisions are made by the **Steering Committee**, which meets every month and looks at issues of importance to the operation, vision and mission of the institute. It is chaired by the director of the Institute and includes six academic members from different faculties, the chairs of the Research and Learning committees (also academics), a student representative and a representative from the uOttawa development office. The executive administrative assistant in collaboration with the director prepare memos that render meetings more efficient. Detailed *for your information* items are read silently at the meetings, while the bulk of the meeting revolves around key *discussion points* that are clearly identified.

Who are they?

Linda Garcia,

- Faculty of Health Sciences, Director of the LIFE Research Institute and **Chair** of the Steering Committee

Daniel Amyot,

- Faculty of Engineering

Louise Bélanger-Hardy,

- Faculty of Law

Emmanuel Dupl a,

- Faculty of Education and Chair, LRI Learning and Knowledge mobilization committee

Nafissa Ismail,

- Faculty of Social Sciences, replaced **Jeff Jutai**, Faculty of Health Sciences in 2023

Martine Lagac ,

- Faculty of Arts

Rob McCulloch,

- uOttawa, Development office

Michael Mulvey,

- Telfer School of Management

Samantha Oostlander,

- Graduate student, Faculty of Health Sciences, replaced **Namrata Bagaria**, Graduate student, Faculty of Engineering in 2023

Brian Ray,

- Faculty of Arts and Chair, LRI Research Committee, replaced **Craig Phillips**, Faculty of Health Sciences in 2021

William Stanford,

- Faculty of Medicine, replaced **Jeff Dilworth**, Faculty of Medicine in 2023

Michael Walker,

- Innovation Support Services, was part of the initial Steering Committee until 2021

Linda Caron,

- Executive administrative support

Research committee – advice on research

The **Research Committee** meets 3-4 times a year or as needed and advises with regards to strategic directions that involve judgements around the quality of the research, necessary research expertise and future direction. In 2022, the Steering Committee decided to postpone regular meetings of the research committee, given that the 2019 pandemic made new research collaborations difficult without in-person meetings.

Who are they?

Brian Ray,

- Faculty of Arts and **Chair** of the LRI Research Committee replaced **Craig Phillips**, Faculty of Health Sciences in 2021

Samia Chreim,

- Telfer School of Management, completed her mandate in 2021

Teresa Edwards,

- Executive Director, In-House Legal Counsel at Legacy of Hope Foundation, Community member

Linda Garcia,

- Director of the LRI, ex-officio member

Amélie Gauthier-Beaupré,

- Graduate Student, Faculty of Health Sciences

Michelle Giroux,

- Faculty of Law

Burak Kantarci,

- Faculty of Engineering

Jauna Munoz-Liceras,

- Faculty of Arts

Linda Caron,

- Executive administrative support

Learning and knowledge mobilization committee – advice on learning

The **Learning and Knowledge Mobilization committee**, meets every two months or as needed. It advises the Steering Committee on all matters related to teaching and lifelong learning, manages the EncourAGE scholarship and implements initiatives related to learning and knowledge mobilization.

Who are they?

Emmanuel Dupl a,

- Faculty of Education and Chair, LRI Learning and Knowledge mobilization committee

Natalie Baddour,

- Faculty of Engineering

Dimitri Bakker,

- Graduate student, Telfer School of Management

B atrice Crettenand-Pecorini,

- Graduate student, Faculty of Education

Raywat Deonandan,

- Faculty of Health Sciences, replacing **Paulette Guitard**, Faculty of Health Sciences

Linda Garcia,

- Director of the LRI, ex-officio member

Firdaus Kharas,

- Chairman and executive producer, Chocolate Moose Media, community member.

Elizabeth Kristjansson,

- Faculty of Social Sciences, replaced **Claire Turenne-Sjolander**, Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs in 2022.

Anne-Chantal Soucie,

- Professional development institute, replaced **Serge Blais**, Professional development institute in 2021

Anne Valley,

- Faculty of Arts

Linda Caron,

- Executive administrative support

Advisory committee – strategy

The **Advisory Committee** meets at most twice a year and advises the LIFE Research Institute on high level strategic directions and national and international positioning.

Who are they?

Sylvain Charbonneau,

- VP Office of Research and Innovation, **Chair**

Jean Accius,

- AARP (Senior VP), completed mandate in 2023

Chitra Anand,

- Advisor to High Growth Technology Firms

Victoria Barham,

- Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences

Jacques Beauvais,

- Dean Faculty of Engineering

Jerome Bickenbach,

- Professor, University of Lucerne

Stéphane Brutus,

- Dean, Telfer School of Management

Linda Garcia,

- Director of the LRI, ex-officio member

Yves Joanette,

- Associate Vice-President, Research, Université de Montréal

Madeleine Meilleur,

- Community member, (past politician)

Lucie Thibault,

- Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences

Myra Yazbek,

- Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences

Linda Caron,

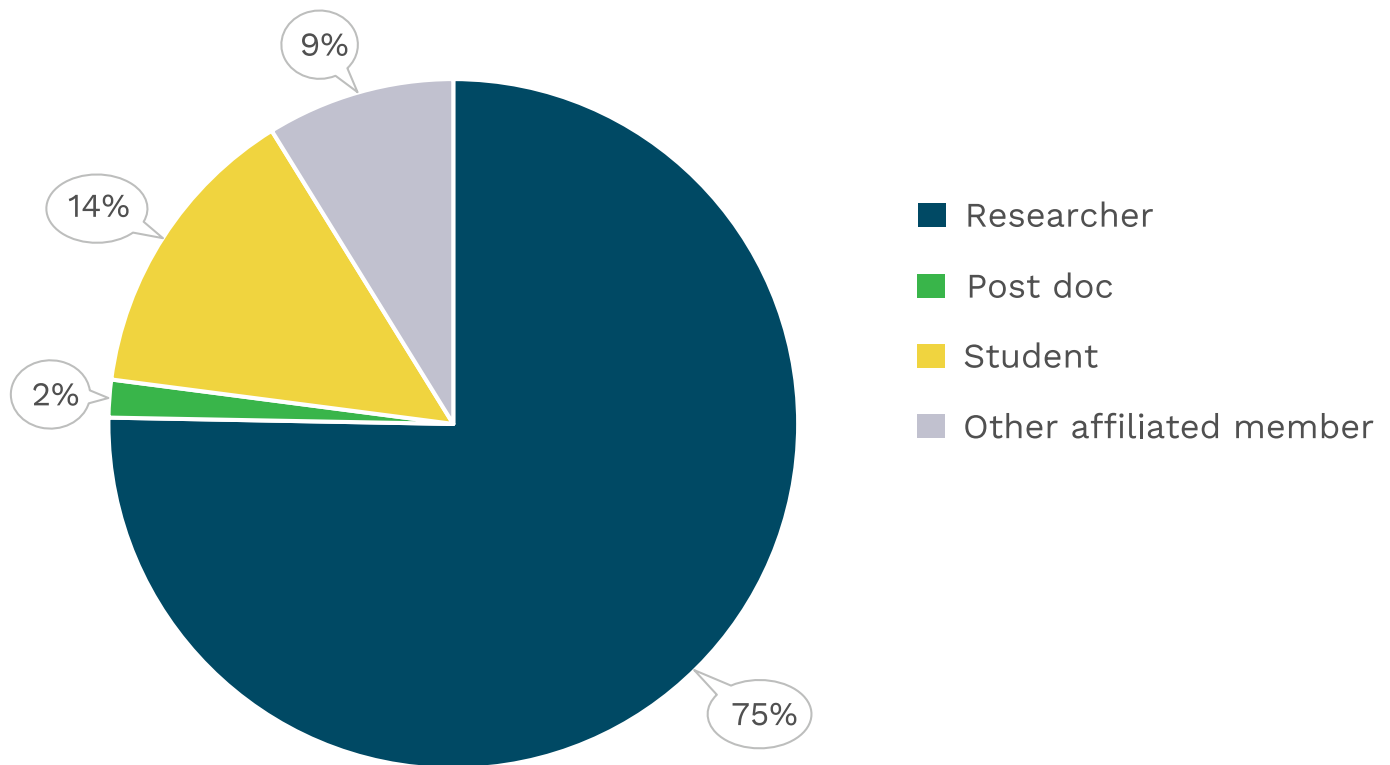
- Executive administrative support

Assembly – the entire membership

As mentioned, the LIFE Research Institute originally attracted the interest of 65 members during its internal consultation, before it was officially launched. Since the core of the LRI is to foster extensive interdisciplinarity across the university, it was important to know about what was important to potential members, right from the moment they registered. The registration form is currently being updated to reflect new levels of involvement, but even during the early days of the LRI, potential members were asked to share three problems they wish to solve given their research programs and interests.

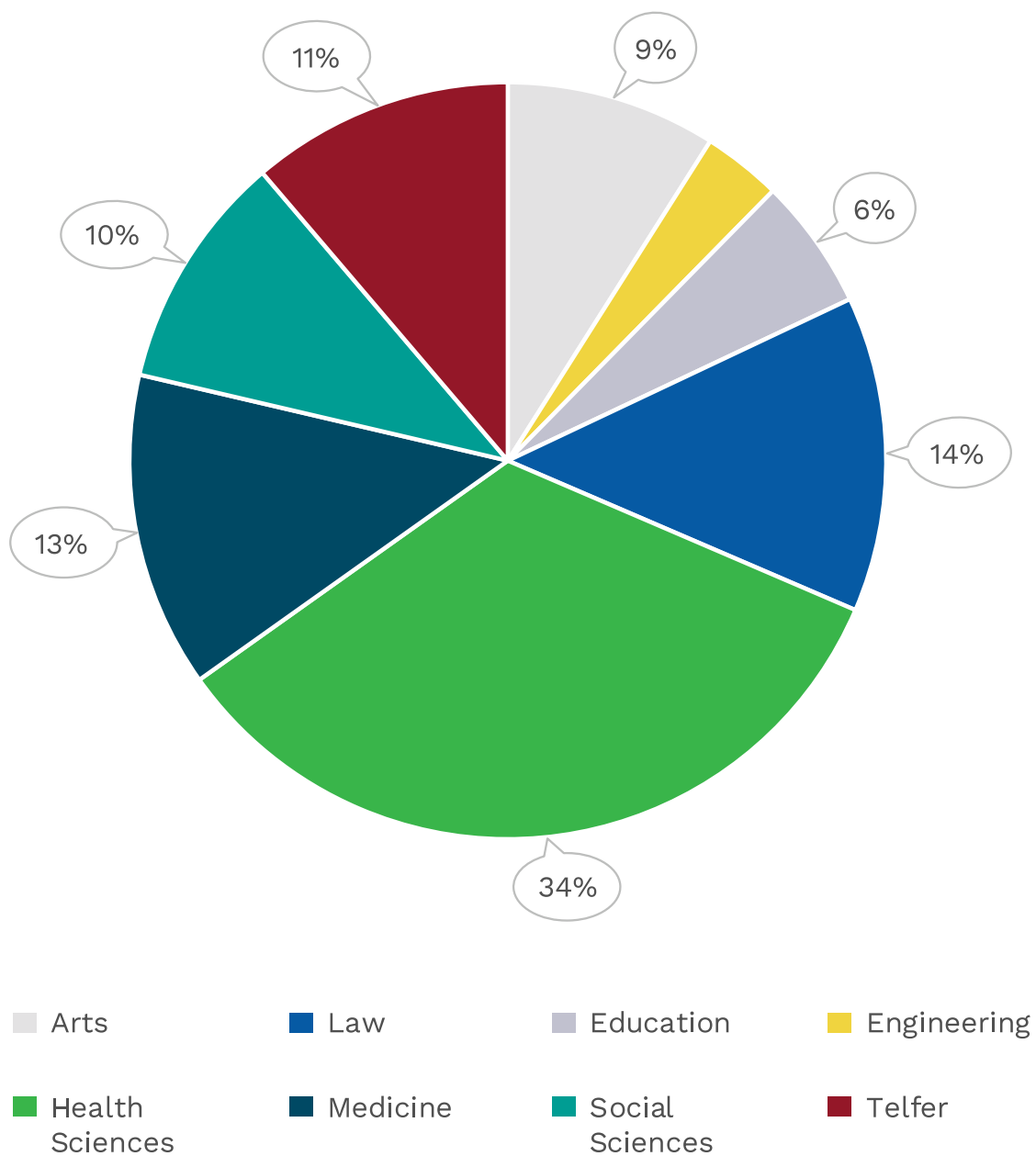
From our original 65 members expressing interest, the LIFE Research Institute has grown to its current 132 members, 75% of whom are researchers.

Membership Type January 2023 (Number = 132)



As expected, the largest proportion of members (34%) have identified their home faculty as the Faculty of Health Sciences. The involvement of members from other faculties is also growing, speaking to the interest in finding an interdisciplinary forum from which to conduct interdisciplinary research.

Researchers by faculty January 2023 (Number = 80)





Much of the work in these first years was setting the stage for the growth of interdisciplinary initiatives, so these pieces of information proved to be invaluable when connecting colleagues. Given that physical meetings were impossible during the pandemic, the LRI undertook other initiatives to learn more about members of the Assembly.

1. **Individual interviews:** Beyond the three problems to solve, one way to get to know the members was through one-on-one virtual individual interviews. They were asked about their research programs, about the promotion of their research, their desired legacy and about how they hoped the LRI could help. These

interviews gave rich information not only on the members' current research programs but also on future directions. Sixty-eight interviews were conducted over an 18-month period. From these interviews, four areas of foci were identified where the LRI could help:

- a. Networking and collaboration
- b. Highlighting our work and making the institute better known
- c. Engaging students
- d. Supporting funding opportunities



2. **Virtual assembly meetings:** Assembly meetings are held once a year. Three assembly meetings were held during the first mandate, two virtual and one hybrid.

- a. In December 2020, a virtual assembly was held during which members of our Steering and Advisory Committees made presentations and shared their vision of the institute. Forty-five members attended that meeting, which was held less than 10 months within the start of the pandemic. The meeting was well received by members who attended.
- b. In January 2022, a second virtual assembly was held. Fifty-seven members took part in the meeting, which included a facilitated discussion with members on the four areas identified in the one-on-one interviews.
- c. In January 2023, the third assembly took place in hybrid format with 24 members in-person and 20 members online. The theme for this final assembly was the future of aging. Facilitated by Steering Committee member, Martine Lagacé, a panel discussion on

the topic was held with six panel members representing each generation from the *Great Generation to Generation Z*. The attendees again expressed their interest in this event and in finding out more about the LRI.

3. **Creation of a member database.**

In 2019, it was decided that the LRI needed a way to document the added value of the Institute towards its assembly and those who had invested in the institute (i.e., the OVPRI, the Faculty of Health Sciences which housed the Institute and other faculties who supported it financially and otherwise). It was time to document the impact of our initiatives on key performance indicators such as grants, publications, future collaborations, knowledge mobilization events and the like. With the help of Steering Committee member Daniel Amyot (Faculty of Engineering) and his students, the administrative team created a member database that allows us to do just that. Still being developed, at the time of this report, all members are listed with their identified problems to solve, keywords and elementary contact information. The database will shortly be used to generate pathways of success and impact.

We got this!

Years 2- 5

Still in the middle of a pandemic, and with an exciting membership to pool from, the LRI Steering Committee focussed on how to move forward. The best way to share what happened next is to regroup our achievements around the four categories that had been identified by members during the one-on-one interviews: networking and collaboration, highlighting and branding, engaging students and supporting funding ¹. There are many achievements that could be listed for our individual assembly members; many publications, grants and events. However, we limited our choices to listing only those initiatives that resulted from LRI activity. The initiatives are too numerous to report.



¹ It is important to note that some of the examples of projects and initiatives that are listed in the next sections could fall in more than one of these categories.

Networking and collaboration

The bulk of our activities in years 2 to 5 were to bring together different perspectives to solve complex problems related to the experiences of ageing,

as recommended by our external consultants. Whilst our committee members struggled with the pandemic and with envisioning a future of research on life trajectories that was not necessarily tied to COVID-19, alternatives for networking and collaboration posed

a problem. One way to characterize our networking and collaboration opportunities are to suggest that some stemmed from organic, ad hoc contacts, while others were strategically planned.

A welcome recognition of the Institute was being included as an official Canadian Research Center on Aging by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Our director is now able to network with other directors across the country who have similar interests. The same can be said provincially, where the director sits on the OICAH (Ontario Interdisciplinary Centre for Aging and Health), which is supported by the Council of Ontario Universities and which regroups all universities in Ontario around the theme of aging.



Organically occurring opportunities

Some of the organic opportunities that yielded the greatest results had begun right before the pandemic and had to be readjusted because of worldwide changes in travel. Here are some of those examples.

Global Ageing Research Partnership (GARP) was a program of research exchange initiated by a colleague from Poland who contacted the director of the LRI for potential collaboration. Several members of the LRI embarked on a series of initiatives that, over the space of 2 years produced the following results in collaboration with colleagues from Krakow (Poland), Hong Kong (China), St-Étienne (France), and Vienna (Austria).

Students were also included in several of the opportunities, including training and publication (8 Austrian, 3 Chinese, 4 French, 8 Canadian). Here is a list of the results:

- **Four books**

- [Researching Ageing: Methodological Challenges and their Empirical Background;](#)
- [Ageing and COVID-19: Making sense of a Disrupted World](#)
- [Ageing as a Social Challenge: Individual, Family and Social Aspects in Poland](#)
- [Well-Being in Later Life: The Notion of Connected Autonomy; a book initiated and edited by members of the LIFE Research Institute](#)

- A **2-day workshop** hosted by the LRI in the fall of 2019, inviting colleagues from the four international partners and highlighting the research of 16 researchers from the University of Ottawa.
- **Two webinars**; one offered by Hong Kong and the other offered by France as well as a documentary film produced by the Austrian partner.
- **5 country reports on Ageing**, [including the one produced by the LRI on Canada.](#)
- A **grant application compendium** created as the work of 14 countries working collaboratively over Zoom during the pandemic. The work involved regular virtual meetings with these 14 countries, led by the LRI. The compendium is designed to help researchers around the world prepare grants on the topic of **Investigating Flourishing in Caregivers of Older Adults**.
- A **special issue of Frontiers in Public Health** was created and spearheaded by LRI members called [Shifting the Narrative on Unpaid Care for Older Adults: Perspectives on Positive Caregiving Experiences and Outcomes](#). A paper including several LRI members was also published within this issue [Caring for the Caregiver: Why policy must shift from addressing needs to enabling caregivers to flourish.](#)



Air travel experience for individuals living with dementia and their travel companions

Following the 2016 and 2018 age-friendly events organized by the ILC-Canada and LRI partnership, both Air Canada and Transport Canada reached out to the LRI regarding dementia-inclusive air travel. In response, a team of researchers from four uOttawa faculties (Telfer, Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Law) made up an initial team of researchers from the LRI. The result of these discussions led to the following outputs:

- Various presentations including to the Aerospace Medical Association, Alzheimer Disease International, Airline People Directors' Council, Netnocon, Transport Canada, World Passenger Symposium, AMA Marketing & Public Policy Conference, ACRA, and others.
- Funding from Transport Canada for two distinct projects involving stakeholders from airlines, airports, IATA, disability advocates, people with experience living with dementia, CBSA, CATSA. Three reports so far have been produced for Transport Canada: *Air travel experience of passengers living with cognitive impairment or dementia*, *Age-inclusive air travel: information paper*, *Online availability and accessibility of airport-based programs*.
- Three doctoral students (one from Telfer and two from Health Sciences) have chosen to do theses on these topic areas; one from a consumer experience perspective with people with disabilities and invisible disabilities, one on the perspective of individuals living with dementia and one focussing on passengers living with hearing impairment. All supervisors are members of the LRI.
- Funding from NRC in collaboration with Carleton University and the Centre for Air Travel Research in Canada.
- Founding member of a core international group spearheaded by the UK looking at air travel for people living with dementia with representatives from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia.

Other organically occurring opportunities

A great deal of the time during these development years has been spent connecting researchers to others with whom they would not ordinarily work.

This entailed many meetings, emails and calls that were received from researchers, community groups, outside funders or other University of Ottawa Centres and Institutes. The LRI did its best to connect as many it could. Some were fruitful in terms of concrete outputs like grants, book chapters and articles. Others involved introductory shared presentations and networks and others were left to be developed at later dates. The database initiative described above in the Assembly section should reduce the amount of time devoted to these tasks as researchers and community members will be able to find each other through the database.

Some of the fruitful connections not mentioned in the larger initiatives (GARP and Dementia-inclusive air travel) previously mentioned, include the following:

- **Decisions and Affordable Social Housing system (DASH):** Three members successfully obtained a grant from the SSHRC following connections made through the LRI. Colleagues are from Health Sciences, Engineering and Telfer School of Management.
- **Impact of COVID-19 on older adults:** the LRI facilitated the connections among researchers across 4 faculties.

This led to several papers, a joint paper to the UN Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons, and two successful grant applications (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council on the role of media during COVID-19, ageism, and older adults) and a second from Health Excellence Canada and CIHR on the recognition of families as essential visitors in LTCH during times of outbreaks such as COVID-19. The group also liaised with the ILC-Global alliance to study the impact of COVID-19 on older adults. Results are now being analyzed with a dozen papers being prepared from that data.

Connections were also made with community groups such as the Bronson Centre, Retraite en action, Council on Aging, Champlain dementia Network, Dementia Society of Ottawa and Renfrew County, South Ottawa Seniors Watch, City of Ottawa long term care homes, and Perley Health to name a few.

The LRI also offered letters of support to members applying for grants and was part of numerous grant applications and initiatives piloted by others, including uOttawa Centres and Institutes. Namely, we engaged with the Interdisciplinary Centre for Black Health, uOttawa Heart Institute, The Brain and Mind Institute, Research Centre on the Future of Cities, Centre for Law, Technology and Society, Centre on Governance and the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services. Another active partnership is with the Telfer

School of Management's Sandra Schillo who invited us to be part of the I2HUB, an initiative that promotes inclusive social innovation. The LRI will be responsible for the arm that will focus on older adults.

Internationally, the LRI has formed a **strong partnership through a series of formal and informal exchanges with the team at the Université Jean Monnet in St-Étienne**, France, particularly the Institut Présage, with Véronique Régner as a primary contact. The director and Dr. Régner have communicated on several occasions to match researchers from Université Jean Monnet and from the LRI around topics of mental health, vaccine hesitancy, age-friendly university and intergenerational programs, housing for marginalized populations, and ageism. We have given talks to the group in France and have produced joint papers. There continues to be great interest in keeping the relationship and collaboration active.

For the past four years, the LRI has also been involved in the [International Workshop on Requirements Engineering for Well-Being, Aging and Health](#) (REWBAH) which brings together practitioners and researchers from Software and Requirements Engineering, Medicine, Health Sciences, Psychology, and other relevant disciplines.

Building Strategic Opportunities for Connections

Towards the end of the 5-year mandate, the LRI Steering Committee realized the importance of networking to our

membership, regardless of whether they were in an early, mid, or late stage of their careers. As the LRI matured, it became more strategic in its approach to networking, especially that the health directives were starting to ease up following the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving forward meant creating innovative ways of bringing colleagues together who had different viewpoints, disciplines, methods, faculties, and ways of approaching complex problems.

Breakfasts and Hexagons

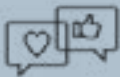
The best solution to emerge was to put the individual ageing person at the centre of our concerns. The question we asked ourselves was: How can researchers, students, policy makers, interested citizens work together to help life trajectories and ageing? How can we move the needle on transitions and ultimately contribute to well-being as we age? Inspired by models of life participation from the World Health Organization and from Quebec, we decided it might be worthwhile to **organize our initiatives around what people needed to live long, live well, and with voice and choice. Ten areas or themes were identified around which we could see ourselves contribute our research innovations and knowledge: Nutrition, Self-care, Communication, Housing, Mobility, Interpersonal relationships, Community involvement, Lifelong learning, Employment and Recreation.** Detailed descriptions of each of these domains, including our possible contributions as an institute and approaches to consider can be found in this [document](#) and are summarized below.

Ageing and life trajectories



Nutrition

Understanding how our relationship with food, our access to it, and our (in) abilities to process it can change as a function of context and age.



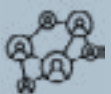
Communication

Sharing investigations on the ways in which information and feelings are shared and understood from the biological processes to ageist language, health communication or through mass communication as we age.



Mobility

Understanding mobility in real lives as we age implies understanding where, how and why people move over short and long distances.



Community

Understanding our participation as citizens of local and global communities and how our rights and responsibilities can be maintained.



Employment

Understanding society's perceptions and actions as related to the value attached to contributors in paid and unpaid occupations as we age.



Self Care

Addressing the factors that influence human knowledge about ourselves, our subsequent behavioural choices, and the impact on our physical and mental health.



Housing

Understanding how our needs and choices in where we live, what we use as shelter, and how we develop these places into homes might change as we age.



Interpersonal Relationships

Sharing projects on how our intimate relationships as well as those with family members, friends, strangers or care providers may be influenced by our contexts as we age.



Learning and Applying Knowledge

Learning can take on several forms and our membership is interested in how that learning takes place across generations.



Recreation

Sharing projects related to sports and games, arts and culture or socio-recreational activities as they contribute to well-being as we age

Members of the LRI were asked to sign up to virtual discussion sessions for as many of these domains that were of interest. Using the information obtained from the one-on-one interviews, some members were targeted for certain areas, but no restrictions were put on the numbers who could be part of the discussions. The intention was to form a series of breakfast meetings where researchers, many of whom were unknown to each other, would discuss areas of possible collaboration to address complex issues

of age trajectories around each of these life categories. Given that we were still in the middle of the pandemic, and that directives for meetings were continuously changing, the ability for researchers to meet informally was received with lukewarm enthusiasm. Groups of as few as 8 members and as many as 30 researchers were identified but mobilizing the group through virtual means to grow their research programs with unknown colleagues proved to be unhelpful.

Travel-older adults with invisible disabilities

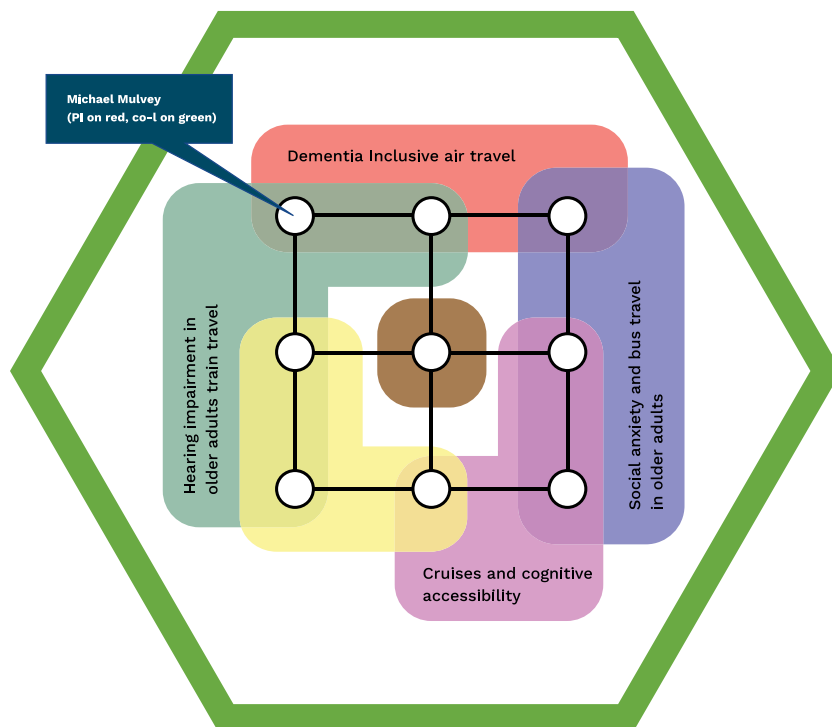


Image credit:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cellular_organizational_structure

In the last year of the mandate (year 5), the Steering Committee used the knowledge gained from the strategies with the breakfasts to strategically focus on 4 areas of potential collaboration using what the team has come to call “hexagons”. The approach was **to create a hexagon that could regroup a series of inter-related projects**. In the example given to the left, for instance, white dots might represent researchers, research initiatives might be represented by colored groupings and the hexagon can represent a clustering or grouping of several research projects that are related and can benefit from networking with each other.

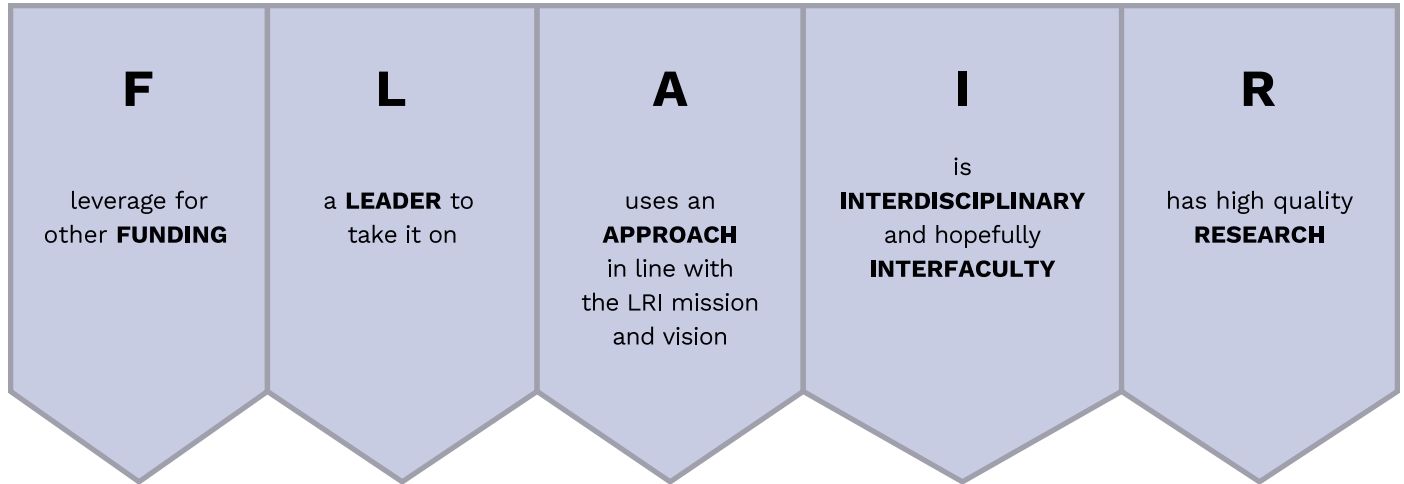
Rather than try to address all 10 domains in the breakfast model, the LRI identified 6 such hexagons moving forward in the next few years with a focus on 4 of them in the last year of the current mandate:

Preparing your body/self to age (lead – Nafissa Ismail), Ageism and the workplace (lead – Martine Lagacé), Enjoyment as you age (lead – Michael Mulvey) and Transgenerational Initiatives (lead – Emmanuel Dupl a).

Thematic Network of Projects



The objective of these hexagons is to coordinate strategic initiatives that can be regrouped for networking purposes and can stimulate the identification of related member projects that have FLAIR.



All of the resulting “products” such as grants, papers, events from these collaborations will be collected in the LRI database which documents the added value of the institute.

One last strategic initiative of note to stimulate networking planned by the LRI is the tentatively named Points of inflection project. Over the past year, some individuals in the community have contacted the LRI to share personal stories whose themes are intrinsically linked to the institute’s mission. Under the leadership of Professors Bélanger-Hardy and Garcia, the LRI is building a collection of about 5 volumes, each with its own theme. The first part of each volume would be dedicated to the «story» of the person: excerpts from a personal diary, an interview with the person or their loved ones, a description of a factual

situation, and so on. The second part of each volume would be composed of 4 to 5 chapters written by researchers. Each researcher will work on a topic related to the text in the first part of the volume. One way of looking at it is to think of an inflection point that occurs in the story, and to use that as a starting point for writing a scientific text. Networking occurs when each researcher will discuss his or her chapter with the other researchers selected for the volume. The idea is to create a synergy between the participating researchers and to approach the life story of the person from a multidisciplinary but «integrated» angle. In addition, we want the volumes in the collection to be accessible to the general public as much as possible. This initiative has been started in the last year of the mandate and should continue in the years to come.

Highlighting and branding

In the latter part of the mandate, it was clear that members found it important that the LRI become better known both within and outside the university. The Steering Committee embarked on a branding exercise with Steering Committee members to ensure that we had a common vision of what we should communicate to the outside world. After much discussion and advice from an outside agency, the LIFE Research Institute's logo was designed with care.

The logo represents the intervals of life trajectories from birth to death with a focus on older life, represented by the larger blue form.

It also represents the fusion of thoughts, disciplines and sectors that would not occur without the Institute; depicted by the blending of colour from yellow and blue creating the central green. The form also indicates the different lenses that are used to see issues of common interest.



The logo and its taglines were offered to members in the form of a signature line for email, and backgrounds for videoconference calls and presentations were created for all to use.

The LRI created some social media accounts (Twitter: @uOttawaLRI and LinkedIn: Institut de recherche LIFE Research Institute) and has a currently underused [YouTube channel](#). In 2022, a social media expert (Sara McGillivray) was hired at 7.5 hours a week and supported by students through a work study program. Social media activity has improved since these initiatives have been put in place, but much remains to be done. Our analytics show improvement and engagement, but we need to further engage our members in amplifying the posts. One strategy that we used that was much appreciated by the members was to highlight members' research and initiatives around specific international days such as Anti-racism Day, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Accessibility Week, International Day of Families, and such. Through our database, we were able to match members' research interests with these international days and highlight them through social media.

The director also spent some time meeting with the Vice-Deans, Research and the research advisors of each of the faculties to facilitate synergies between the strategic directions of the faculties and the strategic directions of the LRI. This helped the faculties learn about members from their faculties that were active in the LRI as well as communicate the strengths and added value of the LRI.

Engaging students

The pandemic also affected our ability to engage students who were struggling with their own personal challenges. This, with the need to build the institute around its academic members, meant that the focus of the first years of the institute was not on students other than the presence of a scholarship fund called EncourAGE, designed to support graduate students whose theses focus on improving the quality of life of older adults.

Some initiatives were nonetheless supported by the LRI indirectly. One such initiative was the creation of a student group called [OASIS](#) (Older Adults and Students for Intergenerational Support). The LRI collaborated with the students on several initiatives including the creation of a video to combat ageism and an International Student Conference on Aging and Gerontology.

The LRI does value the contribution of students and includes student representatives on all its committees. The current student representative on the Steering Committee has begun meeting with other graduate student members. We look forward to working together on the hexagon projects noted above and engaging them more in projects such as one obtained by LRI members working with students on mentorship called Digital Wisdom and funded by the Horizons project.

Some concrete steps have been taken by the LRI in terms of intergenerational projects which have contributed to student interdisciplinary collaborations. The most notable of these was the funding obtained from the Alex Trebek Forum for dialogue, where students prepared, in conjunction with academic members, some commentary on the intergenerational biases surrounding issues of health care, work, housing, leisure, and technology use. Some of the videos from this exercise are posted on the [LRI's YouTube channel](#). A public event and debate had been planned for March 2020 but could not be held because of the start of the pandemic.

Other steps included the support for the creation and delivery of intergenerational courses including one on the creation of videos for impact and a course on mindful ageing.

Supporting funding opportunities

The LRI is especially thankful to the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation and the Faculty of Health Sciences for their financial support. These funds have been almost exclusively allocated to the administrative positions of the Institute and the teaching release of the director. In addition, the LRI has obtained funds from the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Engineering as well as support for its members from the Telfer School of Management and the Faculty of Law. We are incredibly grateful for their support and attribute much of its success to the trust they have given us.



Other revenue sources for the LRI have been obtained through portions of overhead funds that were distributed to faculties and related to grants obtained with the support of the LRI. Sometimes a portion made its way back to the LRI, helping us to recover some of the administrative costs. The LRI has supported some of the projects from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Transport Canada, Families Canada as well as some other projects from the Tri-Council.

One successful funding opportunity which was unfortunately cut short because of the pandemic was a funding program from the Sodexo Quality of Life Institute. The launch of the program occurred in the fall of 2019, and Sodexo pledged 150000 € in the first year of the collaboration. They had originally committed to a three-year

program designed to fund research that would contribute to the future of health and well-being. The program was designed to foster strong, interdisciplinary and ground-breaking research that would modernize our knowledge and conception of health and wellbeing. Three projects were funded and supported by these funds:

1. ***Prenatal Nutrition for Marginalised Populations***

The first research project drew on a novel social nutrition approach to decrease maternal and infant health inequalities.

2. ***Technology in the Home***

The second project focussed on what society has been witnessing over the years, which are the advances in technologies designed to help older adults, and their experience at home.

3. ***Health Inequities among First Nations***

Lastly, the third research project aimed at better understanding health and well-being from an Indigenous disability perspective.

Unfortunately, Sodexo was unable to continue funding the program due to the financial impact of the pandemic on its financial situation and the need to dissolve its Institute on quality of life.

Beyond 5 years – Ready to meet the world

The LRI has encountered some important challenges in meeting its objectives, primarily associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and its presence for three of its five years. We are nonetheless proud of what we have been able to achieve despite these difficult times.

Moving forward, some conclusions can be drawn as the LRI embarks in the next phase of its life. Under new direction, it is hoped that the team will build on what the LRI was able to do so far and start to engage more actively with others post-pandemic. The departing founding director would like to leave the reader with her view of a preliminary SWOT analysis. It is hoped that the succession team will find it useful.





Strengths

- With 132 members from 9 faculties, the governance structure in place, and the successes in the last five years, there is no question that one of the LRI's major strengths is its ability to engage in **truly interdisciplinary initiatives**.
- Because of its theme and focus on life trajectories, its projects and foci are easy to **link with the world outside** of the university. It has been our experience that outside agencies, whether private sector or government have very much appreciated the access to such a large and diverse group that focusses on the lived experiences of our growing aging population.
- Our mission **remains strong and relevant** after five years.
- We have a detailed charter and organizational structure that has proven to be **sustainable** and has engaged senior members of the university community.
- **Bilingualism**

Weaknesses

- The LRI has not yet shown itself to be truly committed to **age trajectories** with groups in younger years and showing itself as an institute that is interested in change over time.
- The LRI will need to educate its membership so that its **social media** can be used more effectively to make itself known and attract funding and students.
- The LRI needs to do more to engage its **student membership** and offer scholarships.
- The LRI will need to offer **more events** that stimulate exchanges amongst its members.



Opportunities

- The concept of the **hexagons** will make it very interesting to attract funds from donors and **large governmental grants**. The hexagons and the structure of the LRI can be easily leveraged to find these funds.
- The worldwide **aging of the population** and the interdisciplinary nature and lived experience concept of the LRI positions it well to create some **international comparisons**, making it open to large collaborations similar to the GARP initiative mentioned above.
- Community members are increasingly taking note of the activities of the LRI. The new registration form that includes **membership from community members** will offer great opportunities for knowledge mobilization.
- The LRI should further take advantage of **the proximity of the federal government** and the new support offered by the OVPRI to engage in initiatives that will change policy federally and provincially as well as engage with governments elsewhere.
- The LRI has a great relationship with **other uOttawa Centres and Institutes**. It should build on these relationships to share in resources and strategies.
- The partnership with **l'Université Jean Monnet** is strong and should be capitalized upon to build strong projects and exchanges across the two campuses.

Threats

True interdisciplinarity is not easy to find in an academia where individuals are rewarded for their individual efforts. The **competitive nature of the research enterprise** is always a threat to true collaboration.

- Researchers are reluctant to **step outside of their comfort zones** and this takes a great deal of time on the part of the director to make the links and create the spaces for colleagues to come together.
- Given the University of Ottawa's Faculty-oriented structure and the insistence of **attaching the Institute to one faculty** threatens the perception others may have that the LRI is as relevant to them as it is to the home faculty. Recognizing the contributions of members and incentivizing true interdisciplinary work remains a significant obstacle under this structure.
- There is a threat that the LRI will be perceived as **trying to do too much** in its attempts to address complexity and change over time. This means that the proposed database designed to document added value will need to be operational as soon as possible to illustrate in concrete terms how it is relevant to the mission of the university to innovate and to continue supporting it financially.



- As the LRI grows, **funding** of its positions will always be a threat. The LRI will need to develop creative funding mechanisms with all participating faculties.
- There is a need to **engage the high-level Advisory Committee** more strategically in the development of the Institute




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