

## **A letter from Terry Hawrysh Chair of OICR's Patient and Family Advisory Council**

The 20 years since OICR's founding have been marked by seismic shifts in the landscape of cancer care and the research that informs it.

Two decades ago, we could have only imagined blood tests that detect cancer better than a scan, or AI algorithms that can accurately diagnose cancer, or the breadth of precision medicines that kill cancer by targeting its genetics.

While these innovations have largely been driven by advances in technology, there has been another major shift in how research is conducted that I'd argue is having just as great an impact: the meaningful involvement of patient partners.

It may seem obvious that patients should play a pivotal role in helping to shape health research. Who else knows what it's like to receive a devastating diagnosis, or to fight through life-altering side effects? But the involvement of patient partners in research is a relatively recent phenomenon. The traditional view was that science was for scientists, who pursued outcomes that were valued from an academic and clinician perspective. Patients were valued as participants in research studies, but were rarely included when decisions were made.

It took many brave patient partners to speak up to secure a seat at the table, as well as collaborative researchers and visionary organizations to shift that paradigm. And I applaud OICR for being part of the shift and becoming institutional leaders in this regard.

Since beginning on this patient partnership journey in 2020, the Institute has made patient partnership a priority. Working with an engaged community, including my talented PFAC colleagues past and present, and dedicated OICR staff, we have carved out a critical role for patients in all functions of OICR, and it's clear the Institute and its research have benefited.

Leading PFAC this year was once again an honour and a privilege. Part of my task with this letter is to reflect on the year in patient partnership. And as I look through the impact showcased in this report, I can't help but notice how much patient engagement at OICR has evolved and the extent of its positive impact. Whether it's new innovations in

diagnosing cancer, new avenues to treat cancer, or new tools and processes to support research, patients have made their mark in collaborating on the design, translation and communication of such efforts.

This past year was also marked by even greater involvement of OICR's Patient Community. This group of over 120 people affected by cancer has grown immensely in recent years and, this year especially, has made its voice heard. Patient Community members play key roles as contributors to OICR research projects and programs this year. They reflected, and provided input, on their vision for the future of patient partnership at the Institute, including how they see the Patient Community evolving.

The Patient Community and PFAC also had the opportunity to help shape OICR's upcoming Strategic Plan 2026-2031. This document lays out the Institute's vision for cancer research in Ontario to guide the next five years of the Institute's work, and I am proud the patient perspective will be well-reflected in its strategic priorities.

PFAC also contributed to another special project that highlighted the patient voice. Working with the OICR communications team, we helped develop and launch the Cancer Research Changed My Life campaign, which features videos and first-person testimonials from people whose lives had been changed forever by cancer research — including multiple members of PFAC and the Patient Community. Launched on World Cancer Day 2025, the campaign will continue throughout the year, showcasing the transformative impact of cancer research through the people most affected by it.

With the official 20th anniversary celebration coming up, the new Strategic Plan coming into effect, OICR is entering an exciting and important year. Throughout its history, OICR has always brought together exciting and talented teams to tackle the biggest challenges in cancer. When I reflect on what we have here, I firmly believe our biggest advantage at OICR is being able to assemble diverse, skilled, experienced and motivated teams focused on achieving the mutual goal of the best possible patient outcomes for those affected by this deadly disease. Now, with patient partners on the team more than ever, the Institute is positioned to fully realize its potential.

**Terry Hawrysh**

Chair of OICR's Patient and Family Advisory Council