

INVISIBLE TO INVINCIBLE

Vivian Hui and Chris Wong holding their twin boys Kieran and Corbin.

Photo Credit: West Wind Photography



VENTILATORS BREATHE LIFE INTO NEWBORNS WHO ARRIVE TOO SOON

THE HUI-WONG HOUSEHOLD IS A TUMBLE OF TODDLER PLAYFULNESS.

At the centre of the action, you'll find two-year-old twins, Kieran and Corbin. It is hard to imagine that they arrived prematurely at 28 weeks gestation, spending the first three months of life in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre.

"I felt a rollercoaster of emotions during those early days," reflects mom, Vivian Hui. "Both boys needed ventilator support from the beginning because their lungs weren't yet fully developed."

Today, the twins are full of life and laughter. Kieran is the social butterfly who loves to keep up with the big kids, and Corbin is the chill guy who loves music, dancing and giving out surprise kisses and hugs. Both boys love Cheerios and books.

As the highest acuity NICU in the province, BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre cares for approximately 1,700 of the most critically ill and premature infants yearly. Thanks in part to the generosity of donors, such as TB Vets, BC Women's Hospital's NICU is equipped with state-of-the-art neonatal ventilators that have helped generations of BC babies breathe easier.

"It is essential to help BC Women's Health Foundation support families in their time of greatest need," says Kandys Merola, executive director, TB Vets. "TB Vets is committed to funding the purchase of critical neonatal ventilators that we know will save lives today and into the future."

BC WOMEN'S
HEALTH
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INDIGENOUS DOULA PROGRAM FOSTERS SAFE BIRTHS AND CULTURAL CONNECTION

GIVING BACK TO COMMUNITY IS AT THE HEART OF HOW DOULAS VIEW THEIR WORK TO PREPARE INDIGENOUS WOMEN FOR CHILDBIRTH.

"Being able to support a new Indigenous family from my community is very special and gives this work so much meaning," says Sage Thomas, a doula whose services are provided through the Doulas for Aboriginal Families Grant Program.

This initiative awards Indigenous 'Life Givers' and their families from across BC with a \$1,000

grant to pay for the hands-on emotional, physical, and spiritual support a doula can provide during pregnancy, labour and after birth.

Last year, there was an unprecedented demand for the Doulas for Aboriginal Families Grant Program, leaving some families at risk of not receiving support.

In November, our Board of Directors helped to answer the call to raise emergency funds for the Doulas for Aboriginal Families Grant Program to ensure that Indigenous families continue to have the birth experience that is best for them. Donor generosity has ensured this program remains accessible to Indigenous families, helping to lessen the disparity that Indigenous women often experience receiving quality healthcare.

"Life Giver and I were able to build a great relationship throughout her pregnancy," says Sage. "It was like going to visit a cousin and talk about all things pregnancy, birth, and babies. After a couple days of early labour, Life Giver had a successful home birth with her midwives, an experience that was deeply rooted in the values the family held dear."

DID YOU KNOW?

Doula support has **shown a decrease** in the use of epidurals, postpartum depression and anxiety, health complications, and hospitalization of newborns.



PACIFIC BLUE CROSS CHAMPIONS HEALTH EQUITY WITH INSIGHTS AND INNOVATION

Pacific Blue Cross began a journey with BC Women's Health Foundation three years ago to take a leadership role in improving women's health in British Columbia.

As BC's Health Benefits Society and the largest health benefits and insurance provider in the province, Pacific Blue Cross has proudly supported ground-breaking reports like *In Her Words* and the *Unmasking Gender Inequity* series — to shine a light on health equity.

The partnership allows Pacific Blue Cross to learn, design, and build evidence-based group and individual health plans that will improve the health and wellbeing of women in BC.

DID YOU KNOW?

PBC has funded **\$400,000** towards insights + innovation in health and wellbeing for women in BC.

Employs over **750** British Columbians, of which **70%** identify as women.

Provides plans that **cover over 900,000** women in the province.

“We realize that health equity is a journey, not a destination. To deliver on our mission to improve health and wellbeing for British Columbians, we need to think differently and look at innovative solutions within our products and services that make a difference.” John Crawford, President + CEO, Pacific Blue Cross

For instance, its New Parent Boost benefit, a first-of-its-kind initiative, provides additional mental health and physiotherapy coverage to new moms and their partners as their health needs and expenses increase. It is a good example of what can happen when the values of two like-minded organizations align for the betterment of women's health.

Serving the health and wellbeing of 1 in 3 throughout the province – and more women than men – Pacific Blue Cross is driven to increase access to equitable healthcare.

In the future, our organizations will be collaborating on research and innovation projects dedicated to breaking down equity barriers standing between women and their access to healthcare. It's complex work that will allow Pacific Blue Cross to reconsider how it underwrites insurance products – all with the goal of improving health and wellbeing for BC women.



“It is humbling to have others recognize my research as a valuable investment,” says Dr. Salmond. “That someone else can see potential in my idea... **It means others are as excited as I am about the potential impact this project could have on breast cancer survival rates.**”

BEATING BACK BREAST CANCER USING TINY MEDICAL TOOLS

Dr. Nikki Salmond hopes to deliver a one-two knockout punch to triple-negative breast cancer, an aggressive subtype of the disease that currently has limited treatment options.

“Late stage and aggressive breast cancers have poor survival outcomes,” says Dr. Salmond, a BC Women’s Health Foundation Fellowship Award recipient whose current research focuses on developing new ways of diagnosing and treating breast cancer.

“I hope my research will make significant strides to increasing our knowledge on how to treat this aggressive subtype of breast cancer so that we can improve treatment options and, therefore, quality of life, and ultimately improve survival rates.”

One in eight Canadian women will develop breast cancer.

To change this outcome, Dr. Salmond, a postdoctoral research fellow in the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of British Columbia, is studying nanomedicine, the realm of medical research where scientists create and engineer tiny medical tools to develop new treatment options.

Mentorship is vital for up-and-coming researchers like Dr. Salmond, as is research funding. Unfortunately, a lack of funding options can curtail important growth opportunities for promising scientists – especially for women. Women’s health researchers are funded less often, for shorter terms and for lower funding amounts than men in BC. Only with donor support can BC Women’s Health Foundation reverse this inequity.

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We acknowledge that we carry out our work on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples – xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

When we refer to “women”, we are referring to women in all their diversity, inclusive of LGBTQ2SAI+ individuals.