

# MEDIA KIT

# 2023



  1st\_exposure

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 www.firstexposure.ca

# ABOUT

Brought to you by the Vohra Miller Foundation, the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the the University of Toronto and Health Nexus, First Exposure is an information hub and research network providing evidence-based information on the safety of medications, plant and environmental substance and other exposures during pregnancy and lactation.

First Exposure will serve the approximately 150,000 pregnant individuals in Ontario per year, their families and healthcare providers. Healthcare providers include primary care and specialist physicians, midwives, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, and other human services providers serving pregnant individuals and new parents.

**Connect with us on Instagram and Facebook at: [1st\\_exposure](#)**



# LAUNCH



# OPENING REMARKS

**Wendy Phillips**

Indigenous Elder  
Grandmothers Leadership Circle, First Exposure

Wendy is of the Bald Eagle Clan; she is Pot-ta-wat-to-me and Ojibwa and a proud member of Was-sauk-sing First Nation in the heart of the Muskokas. She is a keeper of the 8th Fire Prophecies, Keeper of the Ancient Thunderbird Calendar, Ceremonial Leader, Spiritual Educator, Cultural Innovator and Traditional Indigenous Healer.

**Dr. France Gagnon**

Acting Dean, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Dr. France Gagnon is the Acting Dean of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health (DLSPH). She has served as the Associate Dean of Research and she established a school-wide research services infrastructure. France is a bilingual professor and researcher, specializing in the field of genetic and epigenetic epidemiology, and with emerging research interest in student mental health and resilience.

**Dr. Jennifer Blake**

Scientific Director, First Exposure  
Professor Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Toronto

Dr. Jennifer Blake, Obstetrician-Gynecologist (OB/GYN), the Scientific Director of First Exposure, is an experienced physician and respected leader who has facilitated major organizational change in hospital and academic sectors. During her 30-year medical career, Dr. Blake has held several clinical, academic and leadership roles, including Chief Executive Officer of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Chief of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Head of Women's Health at the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, and Chief of Pediatric Gynaecology at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

**Sabina Vohra-Miller**

Co-founder, Vohra Miller Foundation

With a background in clinical pharmacology and toxicology, Sabina values healthcare while being aware of the systemic racism and structural factors that impact many communities and lead to inequities in health. She is exceptionally vested in making sustainable, systemic, meaningful and intentional changes to healthcare in Canada. That is why Sabina focuses her efforts and advocacy on making healthcare accessible for all.

# PANELISTS

**Dr. Seema Marwaha**

Physician Internist, St Michael Hospital  
Editor-in-Chief, The Healthy Debate

Dr. Seema Marwaha is a Physician Internist at St. Michael's Hospital and the Editor-in Chief of the online publication, Healthy Debate. She graduated medical school from the University of Alberta in 2008, completed her residency and fellowship at the University of Toronto, followed by a Master's in Education at Harvard University with a focus on media, technology and innovation.

**Dr. Anick Bérard**

Professor  
principal investigator of the Canadian Mother-Child Initiative on Drug Safety in Pregnancy - CAMCCO

Dr. Bérard has cross-training in epidemiology, pharmacoepidemiology, and genetics from McGill University, Harvard Medical School, and Stanford University. She is full professor of perinatal epidemiology at the University of Montreal, Faculty of Pharmacy, and CHU Ste-Justine in Montreal; and adjunct professor at the Faculty of Medicine of the Université Claude Bernard in Lyon, France. Dr Bérard holds a Canada Research Chair Tier 1 on Medications and Pregnancy; and University of Montreal's Louis-Boivin research chair on Medications, pregnancy and lactation.

**Wendy Katherine**

Executive Director, First Exposure, Health Nexus

Wendy Katherine is Executive Director of the First Exposure Program and delivery partner, Health Nexus. As one of Ontario's first registered midwives, she brings extensive experience in clinical care, executive management, privacy and health quality improvement. As a health policy and strategy executive for many years, she developed and supported the implementation of a range of innovative digital programs for pregnancy and parenting.

**Dr. Cindy Maxwell**

Medical Content Director, First Exposure  
Professor Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Women's College Hospital

Dr. Cindy Maxwell, the Medical Content Director of First Exposure, has extensive clinical and scientific knowledge in complex pregnancy care, reproductive health, medication and lactation while demonstrating leadership and proficiency in teratology. She is Vice President, Medical Affairs & System Transformation and Lead Medical Executive at Women's College Hospital and Professor, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine at the University of Toronto. She ensures the quality and efficacy of the curated content on the First Exposure website.

# PANELISTS



**Annette Paul**

Philanthropy Professional

With a decades-long career in fundraising, development, management and leadership within the charitable sector, Ms. Paul is a passionate and committed leader who advances the progressive missions of organizations and institutions and fosters capacity building, equity and access mandates. Ms. Paul has led and been a part of comprehensive advancement programs at the University of Toronto, Queen's University, Daily Bread Food Bank and the YMCA of Greater Toronto. Ms. Paul is a Certified Fund Raising Executive and holds a BA (Honours) and a Master in Public Administration, both from Queen's University. An unwavering advocate of women, she stands in partnership beside current and future leaders to drive change here at home and around the world.



**Sara Wolfe**

Midwife

Executive in Residence Rotman School of Management

Sara Wolfe is Anishnawbe from Brunswick House First Nation. She is a registered midwife and nurse. A first generation residential school survivor, Sara has worked for more than two decades in Indigenous community and perinatal health, in both urban and remote communities. She is a founding partner of Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto and was one of the co-leads of the award winning Toronto Birth Centre facility. She has an MBA from the Rotman School of Management.

# CLOSING REMARKS



**Dr. Adalsteinn Brown**

Dean, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Dean Adalsteinn Brown is well known for his expertise in research, evidence-informed policymaking, health-care quality improvement, and health systems strategy. He also has extensive entrepreneurial and leadership experience in the private and public sectors. He has played a critical role in Ontario's pandemic response, along with many DLSPH faculty members. He has worked collaboratively on resilience and recovery measures and efforts and is known in particular for his ability to clear complex hurdles to positive change in health care.

# MEDIA RELEASE



# MEDIA RELEASE

## FIRST EXPOSURE TO FILL GAP IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND LACTATION INFORMATION

**First Exposure to be Canada’s premier source of reliable information for families and healthcare providers on exposures to medications, plant and environmental substances, and their effects on pregnancy and lactation**

TORONTO, ON, November 16, 2023

A new platform designed to help pregnant and lactating people evaluate the safety of medications, plant and environmental substances has launched at the University of Toronto’s Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

The platform – called First Exposure – will be Canada’s premier source of reliable and accessible health information for families and healthcare providers. The platform has been created with a \$5 million gift from the Vohra Miller Foundation.

First Exposure will assist the more than 150,000 Ontarians who are estimated to be new or expectant parents, by helping them navigate reliable, medically-sound information on how their exposure to different medications, plants and environmental substances may impact them.

This includes addressing questions around flu shots, prescribed medications, herbal remedies, use of alcohol, cannabis or non-prescription drugs, and chemicals people may encounter in their workplaces.

“Over the coming months and years, First Exposure plans to add more medications and plant medicines as well as environmental substances to the website, so Canadians can benefit from accessing up-to-date, evidence-based information to make safer choices for themselves,” says Cindy Maxwell, First Exposure Medical Content Director.

# MEDIA RELEASE

The website is designed to be inclusive, non-judgmental and private.

No personal data will be collected from visitors to the site, so parents, family members, and healthcare providers can access the information they need to support decision-making in confidence.

Sabina Vohra-Miller, Co-founder of the Vohra Miller Foundation describes the program this way, “First Exposure embodies everything our Foundation is focused on - making sustainable, systemic and impactful changes to healthcare to ensure equitable and accessible health care and scientific information for all Canadians. This has been a passion project for me, and is deeply meaningful on a personal level.”

Adalsteinn Brown, Dean of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, says the platform will help people achieve better health and have access to medically-sound information.

“In establishing the new program, First Exposure is committed to transparency, patient privacy, and the strictest research and ethics protocols to build a needed public resource that people can trust,” he says. “As the website grows, it will become a rich source of data for clinicians and researchers from the university and beyond, who will partner with First Exposure to build knowledge and improve population health,” Brown adds.

Experts in a wide variety of medical and scientific fields, including maternal-fetal health, toxicology, and pharmacology are helping to build First Exposure’s content and database, which will grow to contain up to 500 prescription and over-the-counter medications.

“Outreach to Indigenous, Black and 2SLGBTQIA communities has been a priority,” says Wendy Katherine, First Exposure Executive Director.

# MEDIA RELEASE

“We are committed to working with community members and professionals across the reproductive care continuum to serve those who historically have not been well-served by the healthcare system”, Katherine says. “That is why we have been working with community leaders to embed community responsibility and transparency into everything we do from the start.”

“Representatives of the Black pregnancy health community have worked in partnership with First Exposure to create a way forward to improve Black population health outcomes,” adds Maxwell, who is co-lead of the Black Village Leadership Circle.

Health Nexus, a bilingual, non-profit community health promotion organization is engaged as a delivery partner to build and manage the new digital hub which the partners hope will become Canada's most trusted source of evidence-based pregnancy safety and lactation health information.

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## **Dalla Lana School of Public Health**

The Dalla Lana School of Public Health is a faculty of the University of Toronto, and Canada’s largest public health school. They create new knowledge, educate changemakers, advance practice and guide the way to better, more equitable outcomes in population health and health systems – locally, nationally and globally. Visit their website to learn more:

<https://www.dlsph.utoronto.ca>.

## **Health Nexus**

Health Nexus is a Canadian bilingual health promotion organization that develops and spreads evidence-informed, multilingual, digital and inclusive health education materials to individuals, families, care providers and communities on pregnancy and parenting health. To learn more, please visit

<https://healthnexus.ca>

**More information:** [www.firstexposure.ca](http://www.firstexposure.ca)

**Media Contact:** Wendy Katherine, First Exposure Executive Director  
[wendy.katherine@utoronto.ca](mailto:wendy.katherine@utoronto.ca).

# Q&A



# Q&A

## Organizational Profile

### **What is First Exposure?**

First Exposure at the University of Toronto is a digital information hub and research network providing evidence-based information to the public and health care providers on the safety of medications, plant and environmental substances and other exposures during pregnancy and lactation. The program is based at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health through the generous support and vision of the Vohra Miller Foundation.

### **What are the Vision and Mission for First Exposure?**

The vision of First Exposure is to be Canada's trusted bilingual source of evidence-based reproductive and lactation health information on exposures. Our mission is to evaluate and communicate the safety of medication and substance exposures in an accessible way to individuals and communities, so they can make informed choices within their own, unique, and culturally safe contexts.

### **Who started the First Exposure program?**

Through their family foundation, Sabina Vohra-Miller and Craig Miller committed themselves to improving access to science-based pregnancy and lactation safety knowledge, finding the right home for First Exposure at the University of Toronto and delivery partner in Health Nexus.

### **Who leads First Exposure?**

First Exposure is led by Dean Dr. Adalsteinn Brown and Acting Dean Dr. France Gagnon at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health. The program executive includes Executive Director, Wendy Katherine; Medical Content Director, Dr. Cynthia Maxwell; and Scientific Director, Dr. Jennifer Blake

# Q&A

## **Does First Exposure report to the government? The Ontario Ministry of Health or Health Canada?**

At the present time, First Exposure receives no funds from the Ontario Ministry of Health and does not report to government. We hope that government funders recognize the critical information gap that this program addresses and agree that it deserves to be available on a public basis to all Canadians.

## **Audience and Access to Information**

### **Who is the audience for the First Exposure program?**

First Exposure will serve the approximately 150,000 pregnant individuals in Ontario per year, their families and healthcare providers. Healthcare providers include primary care and specialist physicians, midwives, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, and other human services providers serving pregnant individuals and new parents. The goal is for First Exposure to grow and serve a national audience.

### **Will First Exposure be involved with research?**

First Exposure will be a rich source of information on drug, substance, and plant medicine safety and, in time, population health outcomes. At first, we will start with a website to provide browsable information to users and there will be no research or information collection on individuals.

The University of Toronto is an environment with a wealth of research expertise, and we hope that First Exposure will grow into a network of researchers looking to understand the effects of various exposures during pregnancy and lactation. As such, we are partnering with researchers across the country to stimulate ethical research into the outcomes of drug exposures.

All research at First Exposure will be bound by the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2018) and data governance protocols acceptable to cultural communities.

# Q&A

For populations with their own research governance requirements such as Indigenous and Black populations, First Exposure will work with progressive data governance policies to ensure cultural groups have access, control, and possession of their own data.

For more information on engaging with researchers on First Exposure contact Dr. Jennifer Blake, Scientific Director.

## **Will First Exposure have a call centre?**

First Exposure will be a website first, with information prepared by experts on the safety of medications, plant and environmental substances and other exposures during pregnancy and lactation. As we grow, we plan to provide additional services such as a call centre, a clinical program to help patients review their medication and pregnancy health records with a physician specialist, as well as a future program to offer real-time advice and eventually, virtual care.

## **Can someone use First Exposure if they don't have a doctor or a pregnancy care provider?**

First Exposure does not offer health care treatment. In case of an emergency, visit a hospital emergency room or, if available, call 911. If you don't have a health care provider and you live in Ontario, you can find more information on your health care options on the First Exposure website.

Please go to the Medications & Exposures section and navigate to Finding a Healthcare Provider under the Resources section.

- <https://firstexposure.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Finding-a-Healthcare-Provider-20230911.pdf>

# Q&A

## Inclusive Approach

### **How is First Exposure implementing Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) into the work?**

From the start of planning for First Exposure, we have been consulting with community representatives, faculty, and advocacy organizations to ensure inclusion, accountability, and transparency of our work. Results of these consultations have informed First Exposure's leadership appointments, strategic policies, our team culture, and our first set of community engagements.

Since then, First Exposure has established an Indigenous Grandmother's Leadership Circle to guide development of Indigenous governance, research and community engagement strategies and are working with the Waakebiness Institute at the University of Toronto to advise on design of an ongoing Indigenous-led research and knowledge exchange network, to be called First Environment.

Consultations with the community led First Exposure Black Village Leadership Circle have resulted in a plan for ongoing partnership and engagement, to:

- co-create content in support of Black pregnant individuals and the Village,
- facilitate engagement with Black Communities interacting with First Exposure, and
- provide Black community-centred content and special health topics relevant to the communities including wellness, healing and sharing experiences.

Engagement has begun with 2SLGBTQIA communities, Youth and street-affected populations.

# Q&A

First Exposure is interested in building respectful relationships with representative groups interested in working with us on knowledge generation and mobilization projects relevant to pregnancy and/or lactation, while observing culturally safe communication and progressive data sovereignty principles to support diversity, privacy, and health literacy.

## **In what languages will First Exposure be available?**

At launch, the First Exposure website will be available in English and French. For those users with assistive software, First Exposure will also provide its information in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. With future funding, we hope to provide First Exposure information and resources in additional languages and literacies.

## **How does First Exposure ensure accuracy of information on the website?**

First Exposure maintains strict review processes to ensure information is up to date and accurate. However, we are open to feedback and if you identify information that appears to be inaccurate or incomplete, we encourage you to contact us. In keeping with our rigorous processes, we will take the necessary actions to rectify and enhance our content to uphold the highest standards of accuracy and completeness.

If errors are discovered on the website, we will remove the information immediately and correct it. Any information will be re-reviewed again according to the First Exposure Standard Operating Procedure. An investigation regarding the error will be done to ensure any errors can be minimized in the future.

## **Partners of First Exposure**

Experts and professional groups are engaged and supportive of the First Exposure vision and mission.

# Q&A

We are working with expert and advocacy groups across Canada and the US including:

- OTIS – The Organization of Teratology Information Specialists
- University of Toronto – Faculties of Medicine and Pharmacy and Health Leads from Equity, Indigenous Health, Black Health and 2SLGBT2SQIA Health
- SPOR Evidence Alliance - jointly funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research under the SPOR initiative
- CAMCCO – Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR)-funded pregnancy toxicology research network
- Prenatal Environmental Health Education Network (PEHE - <https://www.pehe-esep.ca/>)

In addition, First Exposure is working with professional associations representing reproductive and newborn healthcare providers and we are very interested in any partnerships that associations or community organizations want to pursue with us to deepen community relations.

## First Exposure Scope and Ethical Framework

### **Will First Exposure have a lab that samples hair or any other human substances?**

Absolutely not, First Exposure is providing information on the safety of medications, plant and environmental substances and other exposures during pregnancy and lactation and will not collect, provide nor analyze any lab samples, and will not work with human samples of any kind.

### **What is the ethical framework that guides the program?**

All research by First Exposure will be adhering to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and under the purview of a Research Ethics Board. Indigenous research will be governed by an ethics framework owned and governed by Indigenous people.

# Q&A

## **Will First Exposure be responding in real-time to issues with medications or substances like poisonings or alerts?**

First Exposure will launch in November with a selection of health topics and medications for browsing online. When new evidence is published or when an urgent situation arises unexpectedly like a substance contamination is discovered, First Exposure will evaluate and support pregnant individuals, government, and the health system by advising on, and broadcasting, next steps.

## **Are environmental substances included in your database?**

First Exposure has been working with the Prenatal Environmental Health Education Network (PEHE - <https://www.pehe-esep.ca/>) at the University of Ottawa and plans to curate information on environmental substances.

## **Does First Exposure have an official position on matters related to abortion and the right to choose?**

First Exposure supports reproductive choice by providing accurate evidence-based information on pregnancy and lactation so individuals can make choices that are the best for them, in consultation with their healthcare provider.

## **Rigorous Privacy Safeguards**

### **Does this website collect information from the public on website inquiries about pregnancy or on their health?**

No, First Exposure will not collect personal information from users browsing the website. The First Exposure website cannot identify who is browsing for the information.

With additional work and further resources, we hope to expand the program to include the ability for users to contact an expert; and with user consent, have their clinical situation reviewed, enrol in community research projects, and potentially be offered virtual care. Accordingly, we will update First Exposure policies and procedures to always keep user information safe.

# Q&A

## **How does First Exposure protect the personal information of website users?**

Strict privacy protocols govern our work to ensure that information on pregnancy or parenting advice, individual inquiries or research are exchanged by consent and according to personal health information legislation.

For now, the First Exposure website will collect no personal data of visitors to the site, so parents, family members, and healthcare providers can access the information they need to support decision-making in confidence.

## **Who is ultimately responsible for ensuring privacy protection?**

The Executive Director at First Exposure ensures privacy and security of the information for the program, with the support of a program Privacy Officer, and in accordance with the University of Toronto's privacy and security framework and provincial and federal privacy legislation.

## **Will First Exposure be connected to police, the justice system or child welfare?**

No. The First Exposure website will be a private way for users to browse information on pregnancy and lactation safety as well as environmental substances and plant medicines.

## **Governance Framework**

### **Does First Exposure have an Advisory group?**

Yes, an Advisory Group at the University provides strategic guidance on establishing the program, its technology development priorities and research frameworks. Several working groups provide program guidance and expertise in specific areas, such as web design and communications.

# Q&A

The First Exposure Advisory Group includes the Deans of the University of Toronto Public Health, Medicine and Pharmacy, the Executive Team, leads of Indigenous Health, Black Health and 2SLGBTQIA health and a representative of the Vohra Miller Foundation.

## **How will First Exposure govern the data you will collect when you start doing research?**

Even though First Exposure is not collecting any personal information as we launch this website, we are making plans to put Indigenous and Black-led data governance mechanisms in place before First Exposure undertakes any research involving website users, or clinical services to individuals.

First Exposure is working with Indigenous colleagues at the university to establish Indigenous-led data governance policies, research priorities and data sharing protocols. Should you wish more information about Indigenous research and data governance, please contact the Waakebiness Institute at <https://www.dlsph.utoronto.ca/institutes/wiwh/>

## **What measures are in place to address conflict of interest? (See Conflict of Interest Form in About)**

First Exposure has a robust conflict of interest policy which requires subject matter expert staff and leadership to disclose any affiliations with corporate interests that could influence their ability to advise the First Exposure. Clear guidelines are followed to avoid promoting corporate products or relationships that would bias evidence-informed advice.

## **More Information**

### **How do I get involved?**

We are excited to hear from you. Depending on your interest, there are many ways for community members, academics, students and advocacy organizations to get involved. Please contact First Exposure at [info@firstexposure.ca](mailto:info@firstexposure.ca).