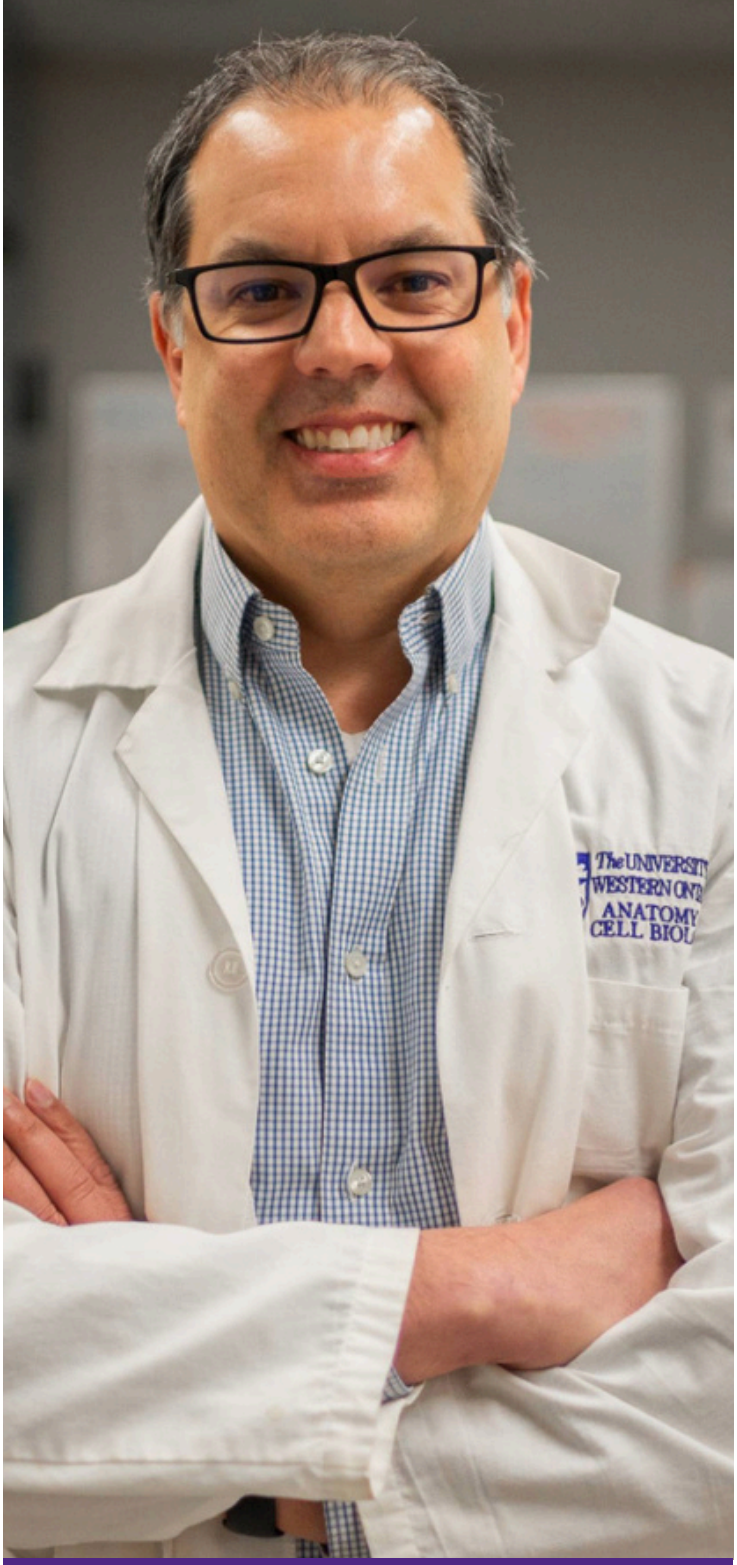
WESTERN INSTITUTE FOR NEUROSCIENCE

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

ELEVATING NEUROSCIENCE EXCELLENCE FOR REAL WORLD IMPACT

Western
Institute for
Neuroscience



# DIRECTORS MESSAGE

Just under two years ago, I took on the Director role for WIN, a young institute with a bold vision and a lot of ambition. Today, I can tell you that vision is paying off and the momentum is real.

This past year, WIN delivered on the infrastructure commitments that define our operating logic. We launched and funded the first two NeuroConnect teams. We deepened our partnership with BHCare as the anchor for a national training platform. We became Western's first official open science institute. We established WIN as the primary North American node in NeurotechEU, and we positioned London, Ontario as a global demonstration city for brain health through our partnership with the International Brain Health Coalition and the Atria Foundation.

On the numbers: WIN supported the development of team-based grants with a total ask exceeding $200 million - 15 Western-led proposals, 15 more with global partners, and 7 Horizon Europe applications. We are still awaiting adjudication results on numerous submissions. Currently awarded outcomes include a $3 million Brain Canada Platform Grant, a $2.4 million CIHR training platform, a $1.5 million Weston Brain Foundation grant, a 7.5 million Euro Horizons Europe award, and a $10 million CFI-IF. For every dollar WIN invested in that work, we generated an 8-to-1 return for Western.

None of this happens without people. Our Associate Directors, Andrew Pruszynski and Emma Duerden, our Executive Committee, our Research Advisory Committee, and our outstanding staff, all of which have all worked hard to build what WIN is becoming. We are just getting started. I could not be more excited about what comes next!

**DR. SHAWN WHITEHEAD**
DIRECTOR - WESTERN INSTITUTE FOR NEUROSCIENCE

# ABOUT WIN

The Western Institute for Neuroscience is one of four Board of Governors-approved research institutes at Western University, as per MAPP 7.9. Established in 2020, WIN brings together basic and applied researchers, clinicians, implementation scientists, and trainees to elevate and accelerate the impact of neuroscience research on the health, security, and well-being of people everywhere. With more than 300 members spanning eight Faculties and 38 departments, WIN has the breadth to address brain health questions from cellular mechanisms through to population health and community spaces. The institute's gene-to-behaviour scope, spanning the full lifespan, makes it one of the most comprehensively interdisciplinary neuroscience institutes in Canada. WIN's mission is operationalized through three interconnected programs:

Neuro Connect

Funds competitive, community-engaged research teams that co-design real-world programs with the people they serve. NeuroConnect accelerates the path from research to results by catalyzing interdisciplinary teams and embedding community partners at every stage of the research process.

Neuro Develop

Builds and supports interdisciplinary research teams and training ecosystems, positioning WIN and Western to respond nimbly to major funding opportunities and the evolving national and international research landscape.

Neuro Engage

Intentionally moves neuroscience into the public sphere, building trust in research with the citizens and taxpayers who are directly supporting it. High community engagement is now a mandatory metric for large-scale federal and philanthropic funders, and WIN is ahead of it.

# THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

**$200M+**
Total Supported Grant Asks

**450+**
Members

**8:1**
Return on WIN Investment

**30**
Grant Proposals Supported

**2**
NeuroConnect Teams Funded

**5**
Major Awards this year

WIN-supported funding awards secured in 2025-2026 included:

- $3 million - Brain Canada Platform Grant
- $2.4 million - CIHR Training Platform (BHCare)
- $1.5 million - Weston Brain Foundation
- 7.5 million Euro - Horizons Europe
- $10 million - Canada Foundation for Innovation Infrastructure Fund (CFI-IF)

Proposals supported included 15 Western-led applications and 15 more with global partners, including 7 Horizon Europe Applications

# NEUROCONNECT - COMMUNITY ENGAGED RESEARCH

Research shows that using a co-design framework reduces the time from bench to community by half, accelerating impact and creating immediate institutional relevance.
NeuroConnect is WIN's flagship community-engaged research program that aims to fund interdisciplinary teams dedicated to co-design and to co-deliver research with the people who are most affected by the questions being asked. Teams receive up to $200,000 per year for a two-year period (renewable), plus dedicated WIN in-kind support for proposal development, project management, and community engagement.
NeuroConnect is intentionally a bottom-up process. WIN does not pre-determine the research. Rather, it creates the competitive conditions that fuels the innovation needed to drive impact and build large-scale grant readiness. From an advancement perspective, NeuroConnect builds the track record needed to attract transformational national and philanthropic investment.

**Funded Team 1: CareFIT -- Sustainable Brain Health**
CareFIT is the first NeuroConnect-funded team, awarded under the theme of Sustainable Brain Health. CareFIT is a co-designed, research-validated health and wellness program targeting Canada's 1.4 million care partners -- people who quietly carry an enormous caregiving burden and face a meaningful risk of dementia themselves. The CareFIT team did not design this program for the community. They designed it with them; with care partners, community care organizations, and fitness professionals who understand what works on the ground. The program combines education, brain health strategies, physical activity, and social engagement to promote cognitive health for caregivers.

**Funded Team 2: PIERS -- Mental Health and Society Impacts**
PIERS (Post-Secondary Intervention for Eating Disorders) is the second NeuroConnect-funded team, awarded under the theme of Mental Health: Mechanisms, Intersections, and Impacts. PIERS is closing a critical care gap for students at Western and Fanshawe College through a rigorous, student-co-designed evaluation framework for eating disorder care. The PIERS team provides students with personalized, interprofessional care including access to psychiatrists, nurses, and nutritionists through The Harbour. Students who access the program are invited to co-design improvements to care pathways, ensuring that the unique needs of post-secondary students are incorporated into future program design. The long-term vision is to export this Western-validated model to post-secondary institutions across Canada.

**Anticipated Team 3: Fetal and Child Brain Health**
WIN's investment in fetal and child brain health is beginning to take shape. NeuroConnect 3 - the next competitive theme, will activate Western's interdisciplinary expertise across some of the most pressing questions in early brain development. WIN is actively engaging potential funding partnerships to launch this theme in 2026-27.

Neuro Connect

# NEURODEVELOP - BUILDING INTERDISCIPLINARY CAPACITY

NeuroDevelop reflects WIN's belief that research excellence and training excellence are inseparable. The program supports the creation and strengthening of interdisciplinary research teams and builds the national training ecosystem that brain health research requires.

**Grant and Foundation Proposal Development**

WIN's Research Specialists have worked with faculty to build interdisciplinary teams, identify funding opportunities, liaise with partners and resources, and provide post-award support. Grant development support also includes identifying and working with community partners to help foster authentic research-community partnerships. With WIN support, over $210M in proposals were submitted to funding bodies such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), Brain Canada, New Frontiers in Research Fund, Canadian Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation, Spencer Foundation, and Parkinson's Canada. WIN also supported Horizons Europe grant submissions across Pillars 1 to 3, and secured Western's first Horizon's Europe awarded project since Canada became a member.

Over $7M in philanthropic proposals were submitted to local, national, and international foundations. WIN is actively fostering relationships with Foundations by including them in various project development processes to ensure that proposals meet the research visions of both the Foundation and the research teams.

**Interdisciplinary Research Team Development**

WIN supports several interdisciplinary research teams that demonstrated what is possible when great science is paired with institutional development support:

kNOw-PAIN: A collaborative team unraveling the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of pain. kNOw-PAIN unites researchers, clinicians, and patient partners and is developing a chronic-pain registry for Southwestern Ontario.

Rhythmically Enhancing Sleep Through Sounds (RESTS): Investigating whether phase-locked auditory stimulation can improve sleep, memory, and other aspects of cognition in older adults with and without amnestic mild cognitive impairment.

Neuro Develop

**BHCare: National Training Platform**

The Brain Health and Cognitive Impairment in Aging (BHCare) Training Platform is WIN's anchor training initiative and one of its most significant institutional achievements. Supported by a $2.4 million CIHR training platform, BHCare is building a national ecosystem of trainees, from undergraduate practicums through graduate, postdoctoral, and clinical fellowships, with free, open-access competency training available to every graduate student in Canada. Western is being positioned as the national training hub for brain health research. The BHCare framework is already attracting national attention and is being developed as an integrated resource connecting WIN's research community to partners across London and globally.

**WIN-Donders Mobility Collaboration**

WIN has established a formal trainee mobility collaboration with the Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition, and Behaviour at Radboud University in the Netherlands. This program provides WIN trainees with direct access to one of the world's leading brain research environments and strengthens the institutional relationship that underpins WIN's broader NeurotechEU partnership.

**NeurotechEU: Primary North American Node**

WIN and Western University are now the primary North American nodes in NeurotechEU - an alliance of nine leading European research universities, including Radboud University, Karolinska Institutet, and the University of Bonn. The network collectively represents more than 170,000 students and over 250 academic and industry partners. Its mission is to build a trans-European network of excellence in brain research, combining neuroscience, artificial intelligence, and medicine. NeurotechEU is now moving into its next phase with an explicit focus on global partnerships beyond Europe. Western's position as the primary North American node was made possible through an established research relationship with Radboud University and the Donders Institute. In practice, this partnership means shared research infrastructure, joint training programs, faculty and trainee mobility across nine world-class institutions, and access to EU-Canada collaborative funding streams that would otherwise be out of reach. This is a structural partnership, and it puts Western on the map in a global neuroscience network that is setting the pace for the field.

**International Brain Health Coalition: London as a Global Demonstration City**

WIN's partnership with the International Brain Health Coalition and the Atria Foundation is built on a powerful premise: London, Ontario, a mid-sized city with a research-intensive university, a robust health system, strong community infrastructure, and a track record of public engagement, is exactly the kind of place where you can test whether brain health interventions work at a population level.

WIN is supporting CanDo, a Brain Health Implementation Initiative that positions London as a global proof-of-concept site for scalable, community-based brain health prevention. The initiative is led by an interdisciplinary research team in partnership with WIN, Western, London Health Sciences Centre, St. Joseph's Health Care, and the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging. The program uses a practical lifestyle framework -- addressing Blood pressure, Activity, Sleep, Social interaction, Diet, and Support (BASIC-S), delivered through trained Brain Health Coaches and Arianna Huffington's ThriveAI digital health platform. The end goal is to validate a low-cost model that can be exported to communities worldwide.

**Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration Events**

Collaboration is essential to interdisciplinary research. To support collaboration amongst our members, as well as with external research partners, WIN has hosted and supported multiple events including:

· Child Brain Health Collision event- a networking opportunity for basic scientists and clinicians working in children's brain health

· CIHR's Institute for Neuroscience, Mental Health and Addiction- WIN was INMHA's first stop on their listening tour, and provided neuroscience researchers the opportunity to share their experiences and vision for neuroscience research funding support

· Parkinson's Canada conference

· Ontario Brain Institute visit to WIN

· kNOw-PAIN annual conference

**Together, these events reflect WIN's commitment to building a stronger neuroscience community.**

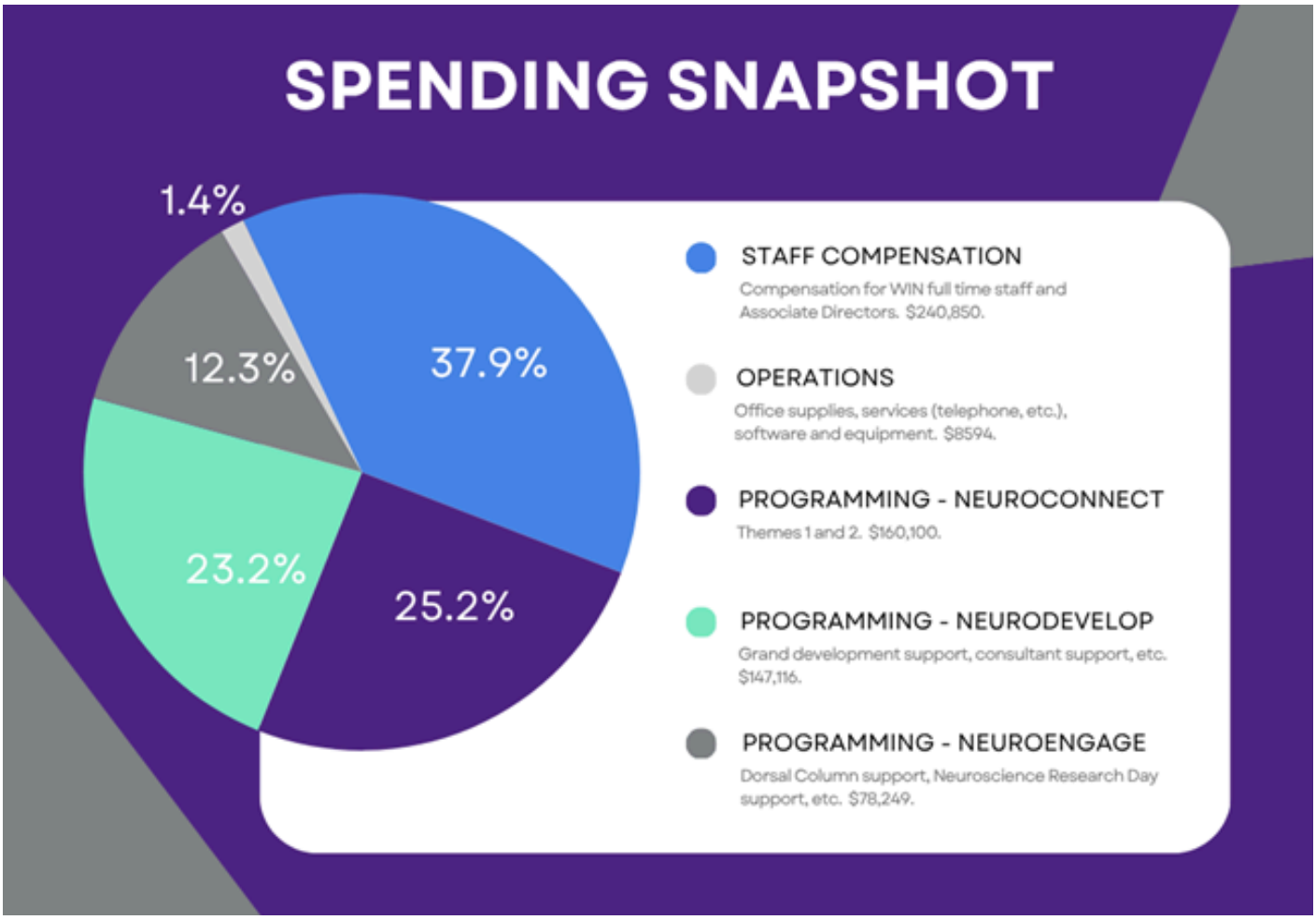
Neuro Develop

# NEUROENGAGE: MOVING SCIENCE INTO THE PUBLIC SPHERE

NeuroEngage intentionally moves WIN's science into the public sphere. High community engagement is now a mandatory metric for large-scale federal and philanthropic funders. WIN is not catching up to this expectation -- it is ahead of it.

**Knowledge Mobilization and Public Engagement**
WIN advances public engagement through sponsorship and support of several high-visibility platforms.
·Neuroscience Research Day, a graduate student run conference with a community-facing evening event.
·Science Rendezvous, an annual festival that takes science out of the lab and into the community,
·The Dorsal Column, a graduate student run column disseminating neuroscience research at Western to the London community.
·Leading tours of facilities and neuroscience research through the Homecoming Talk and Tour, an Alumni Summit WIN tour, and visits from Secondary School Science Students.
These initiatives are among the forums through which WIN moves science into public view. These activities build the community trust and taxpayer confidence that sustain research investment over the long term.

Neuro Engage




WIN's budget and expenditures reflect the priorities of the institute

# STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

WIN is supported by a dedicated partnership development function that supports neuroscience researchers across Western University. As interest from industry, government, and international research organizations has grown, this function provides a structured front door for external engagement, scoping opportunities for strategic fit, supporting agreement processes, and ensuring that WIN's expanding network of collaborators translates into aligned, productive research partnerships. As WIN's research profile continues to grow, this capacity will be essential to converting interest into impact.

# OPEN SCIENCE

WIN is Western University's first official open science institute. This commitment is not peripheral to WIN's mission, it is embedded in the DNA of how WIN operates and how its members approach their work. WIN is partnered with the Tanenbaum Open Science Institute (TOSI) at The Neuro, McGill University, which is part of a large network of 10 institutes, including, CAMH, Hotchkiss Brain Institute, and Baycrest, setting the Canadian standard for open neuroscience. WIN's open science framework was developed through three years of community consultation and includes a foundational commitment to Indigenous data sovereignty, making it the first TOSI-designated institute to do so. After its official launch in Spring 2024, WIN has established an Open Science Advisory Committee of 10 cross-disciplinary members and sustained community engagement through monthly ReproducibiliTea journal club meetings, panels, and workshops. Through invited talks, workshops, and course-integrated training sessions, WIN has reached more than 350 students, trainees, faculty, and community members on topics including introductions to open science, preregistration, GitHub, grant writing, and EDI. Access has been further expanded through the launch of an online Open Science Resource page, weekly promotion of member preprints via communications channels, and the establishment of three trainee awards totaling $2,000 annually to recognize excellence in open science. Working with the alliance of institutes dedicated to Open Science implementation, we are working towards a solution for national open data sharing and creating Open Science training resources for graduate students.

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# LOOKING AHEAD: 2026-2027

WIN enters the coming year with strong momentum, a growing global network, and an institutional review process that will sharpen its strategic direction. The priorities for 2026-2027 are:

**NeuroConnect 3: Fetal and Child Brain Health**
Launch the third NeuroConnect theme, activating Western's interdisciplinary expertise in early brain development. WIN is aggressively pursuing funding partnerships to make this possible.

**NeurotechEU Deepening**
Expand the WIN-Donders Mobility Collaboration and deepen joint training, infrastructure, and funding partnerships across the nine NeurotechEU member institutions.
BHCare as National Hub
Position BHCare as an integrated national resource connecting WIN's research community to partners across London and globally. Continue expanding the training platform at all career levels.
**Open Science Symposium 2027**
Begin planning for the national Open Science Symposium to be hosted at Western University in 2027, positioning WIN as the convener of Canada's open science standard in neuroscience.
**Institutional Review**
Undertake WIN's first external institutional review process, engaging members, trainees, and partners in feedback and consultation to sharpen the institute's direction and governance.

Western
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Neuroscience

**Acknowledgements**

**WIN's achievements reflect the collective efforts of its members, trainees, staff, and partners. The institute is grateful to Western University for its institutional support, and to all external funding bodies whose investment makes this work possible.**

**We also thank WIN's Associate Directors (Andrew Pruszynski and Emma Duerden), Executive Committee (Joern Diedrichsen, Angela Roberts, and Jonathan Lau), Research Advisory Committee, Open Science Advisory Committee, and staff team for their commitment to professionalizing the research life cycle from end to end.**