

2024 Ontario Branch Impact Report

IMPACT IN ACTION

A Year of Hope,
Progress and
Growth



kidney
FOUNDATION



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Our Mission

The Kidney Foundation of Canada is the leading charity committed to eliminating the burden of kidney disease through:

- **Funding and stimulating** innovative research for better prevention, treatments and a cure;
- **Providing education and support** to prevent kidney disease in those at risk and empower those with kidney disease to optimize their health status;
- **Advocating** for improved access to high quality health care;
- **Increasing** public awareness and commitment to advancing kidney health and organ donation.

Our Vision

Excellent kidney health, optimal quality of life for those affected by kidney disease, and a cure.



Message From the President & Executive Director

2024 truly represented a year of hope, progress, and growth.

We speak often of hope and help as it relates to the work of The Kidney Foundation. Hope usually represents all things related to research with an eye to a future without dialysis.

The Foundation invests heavily in Ontario research communities, some of the most innovative institutions in Canada. The KRESCENT program, administered by the Foundation enhances research capacity by providing support to early career researchers.

The Ontario Branch's strength lies in its volunteers and staff located in Chapters and communities across Ontario providing help in the way of program delivery and fundraising.

The Kidney Foundation raises funds to deliver vital programs like emergency short term financial assistance and peer support. We address issues like food insecurity, housing, and access to blood pressure cuffs.

The Peer Support program continues to grow and provides emotional support and resources to patients and families throughout their journey with kidney disease. Of particular pride to our Branch, are the employee and volunteer teams that facilitate virtual support meetings across Canada, impacting patients from coast to coast.

Another example of the Ontario Branch's role in Canada, is its expertise in operating Kidney Car. Team Ontario expanded to include direction of the British Columbia and Yukon, and Atlantic Branches business structures related to Kidney Car. Their guidance and expertise resulted in significant growth of both of those operations, while significantly exceeding targets in Ontario at the same time.

Our signature event, the Kidney Walk, also exceeded expectations in 2024, raising over \$1 million for the second consecutive year. In September, walkers, volunteers, and employees gathered in 28 communities to share experiences and gather outside of clinical environments.

While uniting as the kidney community and providing informal support to patients, caregivers, and families, participants raised vital funds to provide strategic investments in programs and services available to every patient in Ontario, regardless of their geographic location.

These are just a few examples of activities that took place in 2024. The following pages will further highlight the impact and important work of The Kidney Foundation's Ontario Branch.

None of the achievements would be possible without the existence of a collaborative effort among volunteers and employees – a cohesive team working together to improve the quality of life of individuals living with kidney disease.

In an amazing display of support for patients and their families, volunteers donated almost 11,000 hours of their time with an approximate dollar value of \$394,000. There is no possible way the accomplishments of 2024 would have been possible without these incredible contributions.

We look forward to carrying the momentum of 2024 into a successful 2025!



Mary Pat Shaw *A. Thorne*

New Research Makes Recommendations to Strengthen Indigenous Kidney Care

Indigenous peoples in Canada experience kidney disease and kidney failure up to four times more than the general population. Despite this, Indigenous communities also face more challenges in managing and treating kidney disease as health care systems are delivered through non-Indigenous contexts. There is a need to identify and develop culturally-safe ways in which kidney health can be better managed in Indigenous communities.

To address the barriers Indigenous communities face in kidney health and care, Dr. Mary Smith and her team at Queen’s University conducted a research study that worked with Indigenous communities to develop Indigenous strength-based recommendations for kidney health, prevention of disease, and kidney failure.

A strength-based approach was used to capture the capacities and capabilities of Indigenous peoples and communities. That is, how can Indigenous community structure, culture, knowledge, spirituality, and other such aspects contribute to the betterment of kidney care within their own communities. This strategy is opposed to a deficit-based approach which focuses on statistics and deficiencies or weaknesses that contribute to disease prevalence.

Their strength-based approach enabled the research team to engage with Indigenous communities throughout the entire study, bringing together

community members, health providers, and other representatives. From this, they were able to develop meaningful recommendations to support Indigenous kidney health, care, and prevention.

The recommendations, published in the International Journal of Indigenous Health in January 2025, centered around 5 core themes: ⁽¹⁾ healthcare continuity with traditional and cultural ways of knowing and being, ⁽²⁾ accessible hemodialysis and support for home dialysis, ⁽³⁾ increased kidney transplantation and kidney organ donation, ⁽⁴⁾ increased telehealth and virtual medicine, and ⁽⁵⁾ government support and funding.

Although more research is needed to understand and address the complex challenges that face Indigenous communities, these recommendations offer an important foundation in which innovative community kidney health programs and initiatives can be built.

This research was funded in part by The Kidney Foundation of Canada. Our research program remains committed to staying at the forefront of kidney disease research, aligning our investments to patient and community needs, and focusing on where we can invest with the highest chances for impact.

Full article citation: Bachynski, J.C., et al. “Gidoodikosan Giiwitaabimin” (We Sit in a Circle for Kidneys): A Strength-Based Qualitative Study. International Journal of Indigenous Health. 20(1), 1-16. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.32799/ijih.v20i1.39807>



\$3.7M

Invested in Research in 2024



102

Total Research Grants Supported Including:

32 New Grants Awarded in 2024

59 Kidney Health Research Grants

26 KRESCENT Awards

11 Allied Health Grants

\$142.2M

Invested Since 1964

Dr. Mary Smith



Connecting Patients from Coast to Coast with the Support they Need



236

**Peer Support
Group Meetings**



1921

**Peer Support
Group Attendance**

1,114

**One to One
Direct Peer Matches**



162

**Peer Support
Volunteers**

For Katie, the summer of 2023 marked the simultaneous death and rebirth of her identity. In the blink of an eye, Katie went from a flourishing career, a loving partner and active lifestyle, to Katie, a 36-year-old blind-sided by acute kidney failure.

In those first few weeks after the diagnosis Katie found solace in reaching out to The Kidney Foundation for support. At the time, she felt defeated and alone, reliant on her family for just about everything. One of the first referrals she received was an invitation to join a peer support group meeting.

She thought she had lost everything but found words of wisdom from a woman who lived with kidney disease for decades. Her wisdom offered Katie a lifeline, a beacon of hope, in what seemed like such a dark place. The support came at a time when Katie needed kind words, good advice, and a dose of encouragement.

Katie's story is not unlike the many stories we hear each day. The caring support of the community can make a tremendous difference in how one lives with kidney disease, no matter where they might be in their journey with the disease.

The Kidney Foundation's Kidney Connect Peer Support program continues to grow and virtual group support expanded across Canada in 2024. New niche groups continue to be added to support some of the

unique types of kidney disease, such as glomerulonephritis or polycystic kidney disease.

But that's not all, there are groups to support caregivers, young adults, people who are living with reduced kidney function and not yet on dialysis – there really is a safe space for everyone.

Peer support whether in a virtual group setting, or one to one by phone, or online, offers people affected by the disease a place to feel supported, heard and less alone. The program is a key service where trained volunteers who either live with or are affected by the disease can help answer questions and share experiences in a safe, caring environment.

*Katie with her mom Becky
at La Serata Italiana Gala.*



Financial Assistance Targets Food Insecurity in Northern Ontario



\$272,455

**Short Term
Financial Assistance**

\$116,000+

**Additional
Financial Support**



957

Grants Provided



\$87K

**Support for
Camp Programs**

*I love the food cupboard.
I can find things I can eat.
It doesn't stay full
for long.*

Janet*

*Name changed to protect privacy

Many Canadians living with kidney disease experience financial hardship. Dialysis is a time-consuming, yet a critical life-sustaining treatment. It often results in a decrease of income while out-of-pocket expenses increase. This might include the cost for transportation to treatment and the purchase of medications. Add to this the current economy and rising costs of food, and it's a recipe for significant challenges for the thousands of Canadians who live with the disease. Should I pay for my hydro bill or medications – or can I afford to get to treatment on all three days this week?

The Kidney Foundation's Short-Term Financial Assistance program provides tangible support to patients to help with expenses associated with kidney disease and its treatment. Applications are made through renal social workers for limited short-term funding. Each application is reviewed carefully to ensure that it meets the guidelines.

In 2024, we consulted with renal programs in Northern Ontario to learn what issues were most pressing within their communities and how the Foundation might best address them. Unanimously, we heard that food insecurity was the greatest threat and an issue where renal leaders felt we could make a tremendous difference.

Working with the five northern regional renal programs, we set out to find solutions that fit each centre – not a one size fits all approach. For some, renal social workers have access to grocery gift cards to give

to patients who demonstrate a clear need, while others have created food cupboards or mini food banks within their renal unit, making kidney-friendly food options accessible. Patients who access this support are also provided with information on other Kidney Foundation resources to help them in their journey with kidney disease.

“Managing life with kidney disease is complex. We know clinical kidney care in Ontario itself is very good – dialysis is available to those who need it. Transplants happen. Still, it takes a toll physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially. The Kidney Foundation remains concerned that those living with kidney disease face mounting pressures to purchase affordable and renal-friendly food. We know what you eat affects your kidney health. Short term financial assistance targeted to food security makes a difference every day for those hoping to live well with kidney disease,” said Craig Lindsay, Director of Programs and Public Policy.

Tara Blake, a Registered Dietitian at the North Bay Regional Hospital has been instrumental in helping to deliver the program locally. “Thank you for your support, it is making a tremendous difference in our patients' lives – they tell me they feel supported and 'cared for.' In addition, I'm noticing that patients are using the food cupboard as an education tool to identify packaged foods that are better choices, and it has led to informal education as I'm replenishing the cupboard.”

Grassroots Events Grow Public Awareness

Public awareness to promote kidney health and organ donation has been a key focus of The Kidney Foundation’s mission since its inception. Through our public awareness outreach, our goal is for Canadians to have a better understanding of their kidneys, understand their potential risk for disease and understand that there is a community of support just a phone call or click away.

Promoting public awareness can take many forms – our first instinct is to think of large public campaigns, but equally important and effective, are opportunities when our volunteers and employees can connect directly with community members to speak about kidney health and organ donation, helping to add visibility to our organization and how we can be a source of a support throughout the kidney disease journey.

Through partnerships with community organizations, The Kidney Foundation was able to make strides in promoting kidney health to communities at increased risk.

Notably, new partnerships with the Algonquins of Pikwakinagan First Nation near Golden Lake, the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, The Métis Nation of Ontario, the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, the Rocena Kidney Foundation to support outreach to Ottawa’s Black community as well as participation at the African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) Organ Health Summit.

The Kidney Foundation participated in numerous health fairs including several that were aimed to support those over age 50 with their wellness goals.

Educational activities have been well received, particularly those highlighting kidney-friendly cooking. Patsea recently participated in a Kidney Friendly Nutrition Workshop hosted by The Kidney Foundation and the Métis Nation of Ontario.

I’m thankful for programs like The Kidney Foundation’s Kidney Friendly Cooking & Nutrition Education Workshop, which I attended recently in Ottawa.

It was filled with delicious recipes from a Métis cookbook. We made couscous, chicken noodle soup, and blueberry crumble. I couldn’t believe this flavourful food was kidney-friendly! It tasted like home to me.

I was interested in attending the class because I live with diabetes and high blood pressure. Both conditions run in my family, and I know that having them also puts my kidney health at risk. The workshop helped me realize that eating healthy doesn’t mean dieting and restricting. It has more to do with getting the right balance of nutrients in every meal.



Patsea



123

**Patient Education Sessions
(Virtual And In-Person)**



5,000+

**Attendance for
Patient Education Events**

Donated Vehicles Become Lifesaving Machines

Driving Change

Cars that run, cars that don't- it doesn't matter if it's a sedan, SUV, truck, or minivan – unwanted vehicles can become Kidney Cars and help Canadians living with kidney disease. The Kidney Foundation's Kidney Car program has been the homegrown Canadian choice in car donation for over 30 years.

While Kidney Car is a service, helping to recycle thousands of vehicles each year – it is a leading fundraising initiative that makes it possible for The Kidney Foundation to carry out its mission to provide hope and help to the 1 in 10 Canadians living with kidney disease.

People consider car donation for a variety of reasons. For some, it's a way to give to their favourite cause and get a charitable tax receipt for their gift. Others are simply looking for a simple and easy way to rid themselves of a car they no longer use. Either way, cars donated to Kidney Car help fuel patient programs and research.

The Kidney Car program is powered by partnerships with industry-leading automotive recyclers, ensuring that every step of the donation process is managed with efficiency and care by The Kidney Foundation team.

Our collaborations with proud Canadian businesses such as Kenny U Pull and Nicklin Auto have been instrumental in evolving the program, maximizing efficiency, and generating the highest possible funds to support life-changing research and continue the delivery of patient services and programming.

As Canada's longest-running car donation program, we've earned the trust of tens of thousands of donors who have chosen to leave a legacy through car donation. Maybe your car could be a Kidney Car.

\$18,500

**Highest Valued
Car Donation in 2024**



5,832
Cars Donated



\$5.5M
Raised



2
Core Partners

Fundraising Drives Are a Win-Win

Kidney Clothes Raises Funds to Support our Mission

M.M. Robinson High School in Burlington made history with their Kidney Clothes Drive! Their incredible efforts brought in over 13,000 lbs. of textiles and other items—breaking local records and making a tremendous difference.

Fundraising drives with Kidney Clothes help turn unwanted textiles into important funds to support both the mission of The Kidney Foundation as well as the participating partner.



My friend told me about fundraising with Kidney Clothes, she had done a textile drive at her school as well.

I'm so excited about this - thrilled to help The Kidney Foundation and to bring some funds to the MM Robinson football team! Thank you again and I look forward to working together again!

M.M. Robinson High School



6M lbs
of Textiles
Collected



1.5M lbs
of Miscellaneous
Items



147,880
Homes Visited



Maddie and Kathleen

Finding Strength in Community

The Kidney Walk is the largest community fundraising event held each year from coast to coast. In Ontario, 28 walks were held in communities large and small throughout the month of September.

The Kidney Walk is a fun, family-friendly event that brings together families, friends and partners in kidney care. There is strength in community, and through the walk people living with kidney disease see that they are not alone in their experience.

For many it's a celebration where families can show their loved ones that they stand behind them and support them in their journey. Others celebrate the gift of life through the Kidney Walk, as well as transplant anniversaries. Like any family reunion, the walk is a time to reconnect with familiar faces, to laugh and smile while raising significant funds to support and the Foundation's mission.

For Kathleen, a kidney and liver transplant recipient, the Kidney Walk is a way to connect with others in the community. Volunteering for The Kidney Foundation and participating in the walk is a way that she and her family give back. Kathleen feels a deep passion and responsibility to use her second chance at life to inspire others, to raise awareness and enhance the supportive community she's found at The Kidney Foundation.

Kidney Walk by the Numbers



\$1,068,463

Raised



1858

Participants



28

Walks in Ontario



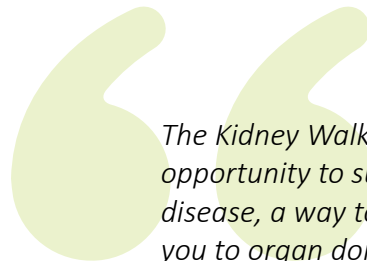
230

Walk Champions
(Participants Raising \$1000+)



5km

Average Walk Length



The Kidney Walk is an excellent opportunity to support those with kidney disease, a way to honour and say thank you to organ donors and their families, celebrate recipients and give hope to those still waiting- with friends and family by your side.

Kathleen Zavarise

10,000+ Volunteer Hours

Online Engagement



17,000+
Social Media Followers



6,000+
Connect Via
E-newsletters



14
Online Webinars



622
Online Webinar
Attendance

Volunteer Voices: Sharing Their Impact

There's a fulfilling feeling about giving back to the community. It's great to see the impact that the organization has on people who are living with kidney disease and seeing them thrive in society. It's also rewarding to see people appreciate your efforts.

Matthew

Volunteering for the Kidney Foundation is a way for me to 'give back', offering hope to those still waiting for transplant and celebrating life with other recipients while ensuring my donor's legacy is honoured.

I feel a deep passion and responsibility to use my second chance at life to inspire others, raise awareness and enhance the supportive community the Foundation offers. It is about keeping hope alive!

Kathleen

The time and effort I have put into my work over the years volunteering, I believe has made a difference in the lives of those living with kidney disease.

Elizabeth

I've been doing one-on-one peer support for a few years now and I can tell you how good it feels and how rewarding it is to share my journey and see others feel relieved that they're not alone.

Loi

Volunteering is important to advocate to others who are contemplating donating and are unsure. When others hear our story, I hope it will inspire people to think about becoming a living donor.

Kelly



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