

Chez nous

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Montreal Children's
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Shaping our purpose at the Montreal Children's Hospital

At the Montreal Children's Hospital, part of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), our unwavering commitment to excellence in patient care, innovation and academic leadership continues to inform our future. As we look ahead, we are shaping our purpose — advancing a bold and focused clinical strategy designed to meet the evolving needs of our population and to deliver world-class, patient and family-centred care across Quebec.

A clear clinical plan is essential to ensuring that this renewed purpose translates into tangible improvements in patient outcomes, operational effectiveness and system-wide impact. It provides a cohesive framework for decision-making, resource allocation and program development — allowing us to prioritize initiatives that deliver the greatest benefit to children and families. It also enables us to articulate a unified vision to partners, government bodies and donors, ensuring alignment and coordinated efforts across all levels of care.

In July, we were proud to welcome Santé Québec to the MUHC — an important opportunity to strengthen collaboration and share our redefined vision for high-quality pediatric healthcare that is accessible, equitable and sustainable.

Our newly-developed strategic priorities reflect this renewed sense of purpose, focusing on several key areas essential to the health and well-being of the communities we serve:

- Reducing wait times, highlighted by our recent success in eliminating surgical waitlists exceeding one year, demonstrating our commitment to timely access to care.
- Expanding and strengthening Complex Care Services, through robust interdisciplinary models that deliver coordinated, compassionate treatment for patients with conditions involving multiple organ systems that require high-intensity care in various settings and sectors.

- Transforming pediatric pain management into a unified, trauma-informed approach, continuing to ensure every child benefits from consistent, evidence-based care.
- Growing community partnerships to support patients closer to home, improve continuity of care and reduce avoidable hospital visits — reflecting our broader commitment to equitable and sustainable healthcare delivery.
- Innovating through new technologies, including gene therapy programs and surgical robotics, to offer more personalized, minimally-invasive treatments.
- Expanding specialized programs in areas such as eating disorders, bariatric surgery, burn and trauma care, fetal cardiology, diabetes and aerodigestive conditions — addressing needs through family-centred, interdisciplinary care.

Beyond these clinical priorities, our plan reinforces the vital role of people through recruitment and retention, staff engagement, and fostering a respectful, safe and supportive work environment for all members of the MUHC team. By linking our clinical vision to workforce planning, infrastructure and innovation, we are laying the groundwork for sustainable excellence.

None of this would be possible without the dedication, expertise and compassion of the healthcare workers who make up the Montreal Children's Hospital. From the bedside to the conference room, your commitment is the foundation of everything we do. We are deeply grateful for your continued efforts and the exceptional care you provide to children and families every day.

Together — with our dedicated staff, patients, families, donors and partners — we are shaping the future of pediatric healthcare with renewed purpose, compassion, collaboration and innovation. Thank you for your trust and support as we embark on this important journey.

Dr. Tanya Di Genova

Associate Director of Professional Services
Montreal Children's Hospital

Cindy McCartney

Associate Director of Nursing
Montreal Children's Hospital and Women's Health Mission of the MUHC



A calm haven: Test Centre launches multisensory room

By Caroline Fabre

For many children, visiting a hospital can be intimidating. Bright lights, unfamiliar surroundings and medical equipment often spark anxiety, even before a procedure begins, making the experience particularly overwhelming. Recognizing the need to help children cope, the Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH) Pediatric Test Centre (PTC) has inaugurated a new multisensory room inspired by the Snoezelen approach, a space designed to reduce stress, encourage exploration and create a feeling of calmness for children and their families by stimulating the senses. continued >

► Above: Blood tests have become much easier for Océane since she has access to the new multisensory room.



► Gabriella Boffice and Erica Crimi created the multisensory room at the PTC to make the environment less intimidating for patients.

The idea for the room was born from a clear observation: many patients at the PTC struggle to feel comfortable in traditional clinical spaces.

“We’ve been trying to make adaptations where possible,” explain Erica Crimi and Gabriella Boffice, Child Life Specialists. “We know that multisensory rooms are safe spaces in schools and community centres for neurodivergent children. So we wanted to create something similar here: a place less intimidating, more familiar and approachable.”

Officially inaugurated in late September, the room features a variety of sensory tools and interactive elements such as the Snoezelen machine, which is a bubble tube with floating fish, as well as fiber-optic strands, ambient lights, glow-in-the-dark stars, tactile toys and projectors, combined to create an inviting, playful environment. Children can

control some of the lights and explore the space at their own pace. A neon mirror with encouraging words and soft relaxation sounds further enhance the calming atmosphere.

The room was intentionally designed to be sensory friendly without being overwhelming. This careful balance ensures that children can engage with the space while feeling safe and supported, rather than overstimulated.

“We removed unnecessary materials, kept the walls simple and focused on items that promote exploration and relaxation,” says Gabriella.

FAMILIES WITNESS REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATIONS

By creating an environment where children feel safe and engaged, it makes visits smoother for patients, but also for their caregivers.

The impact of the multisensory room is perhaps best seen through the experiences of the families who use it. Geneviève Bernicky, mother of Océane, shares how the room has transformed her daughter’s medical appointments.

“Océane, who is 12 years old, has autism, is non-verbal, has motor difficulties and has always found hospital visits stressful,” says Geneviève. “The Snoezelen room has changed that completely. She loves the bubble tube and the floating fish, and her anxiety drops by 70 to 80 per cent as soon as we enter. The room lets her focus on play instead of the procedure and for me, as a parent, it’s a huge relief.”

From tactile and visual objects to adjustable lights and sounds, the environment allows children to explore, feel in control and approach medical procedures with confidence.

“I have never seen my daughter so eager to come to the MCH,” says Geneviève. “She used to dread blood tests, but now she even asks to go.”

SUPPORTING STAFF AND ENHANCING CARE

The benefits extend beyond patients and families; hospital staff also notice the positive effects of the multisensory room. PTC nurses and child life specialists report that having a calm, inviting space makes their interventions smoother and more effective.

“When a child is hesitant or anxious about entering a clinical area, it puts staff in an uncomfortable position.

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The multisensory room helps the child engage in play first, which makes procedures like blood tests much easier to carry out,” explains Erica.

“The room also serves as a teaching tool, helping staff understand the impact of sensory input on children,” adds Gabriella.

“By seeing how children respond in this space, staff learn to adjust their approach: lowering their voices, being patient and meeting the child where they are. It encourages everyone to adopt a more thoughtful, calm approach to care.”

EXPANDING SENSORY-INFORMED CARE ACROSS THE HOSPITAL

While the PTC now has a permanent multisensory room, the Child Life Department is working to extend sensory-informed care throughout the hospital. The Sunshine Adaptive Program will give clinics and inpatient units tools to support patients with sensory needs across all areas of care.

This protocol includes a Sensory Screening Questionnaire to identify individual

triggers and preferences, and a sensory toolkit containing bubble lamps, fiber optics, tactile fidgets and white noise machines. These materials allow staff to quickly create temporary Snoezelen spaces or make small environmental adjustments, like dimming lights or playing soft music, to help children feel calm, in control and engaged.

“Our goal is to make sensory-informed care more accessible,” says Gabriella. “The room shows what is possible when we adapt the environment to meet a child where they are. Small adjustments in clinical spaces can make a huge difference in the child’s experience and we’re excited to help teams across the hospital do the same.”

Early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Even families whose children experienced the room before it was fully completed say it was transformative, while staff have noted that the adaptations make procedures easier and more effective. One memorable patient experience involved a child who had previously struggled with blood tests; after exploring the multisensory room, she stayed engaged with the



► Océane and her mother Geneviève Bernicky

bubble tube and a game, and barely noticed the procedure was happening, leaving her father amazed and relieved.

Thank you to the Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation for its support for the project. ❁

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On the cover:
Océane in the PTC's new multisensory room

Cover photo: Caroline Fabre

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Care for every child at the MUHC

By Christine Bouthillier

Lack of access to care is sometimes cited as one of the causes of emergency overcrowding. A physician at the Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH) decided to tackle the problem head on and find community doctors for follow-up after hospitalization for all children cared for at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC). continued >

► Above: Dr. Matthew Donlan is behind a project that provides community-based medical follow-up care to all children cared for at the MUHC who need it.

Throughout his career, Dr. Matthew Donlan, a pediatrician at the MCH, has regularly observed that many patients seen at the hospitals where he has worked leave without any proper follow-up plan. Babies leave the hospital after birth without their families knowing who their primary care provider will be and children with chronic illnesses often lack a doctor for follow-up. All of these challenges are daunting for families.

In 2022, he decided to develop a way to ensure that all children seen at the MUHC are followed up in the right place at the right time. Not all patients need the complex, specialized care that the MUHC provides. But all children do need care. That is why he developed the Care for Every Kid Program. Babies born at the MUHC are linked to a primary care provider before leaving the hospital and children with special health-care needs are linked to a community pediatrician.

Dr. Donlan visited or called local primary care providers, as well as all pediatric clinics in the province to understand their capacity. He then set up an informal process through which he personally connected children seen at the MCH who needed care with a doctor in their community.

“A grassroots approach with community involvement is what rendered this seemingly unsolvable problem solvable,” he explains.

AN UNDENIABLE SUCCESS

Since 2022, more than 3,500 children have been referred to a pediatrician in their area to ensure they received the appropriate care at the right place.

This not only helped reduce emergency visits, but also allowed MCH pediatricians to focus on their mandate: providing tertiary-level specialized care to children with acute or complex needs.

In the past year the process has been formalized, and a discharge coordinator and a community liaison agent are responsible for contacting clinics and families.

Dr. Donlan is also about to launch an app to facilitate the process. By entering the patient’s postal code, it will be possible to find a clinic near their home that can see them and send the referral there.

NEWBORNS AS WELL

Babies also need regular health check-ups after birth, particularly to monitor their growth and development, as well as for urgent needs. In 2024, all babies born at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) living in the CIUSSS West-Central Montreal territory were linked to a family doctor. In 2025, that was extended to all babies born at the RVH.



► Born at the Royal Victoria Hospital, little Elsie Tirunampalli was able to receive follow-up from a pediatrician thanks to Dr. Donlan.

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This is the case for little Elsie Tirunampalli, born in March 2025 at the Royal Victoria Hospital. While pregnant, her mother suffered from gestational diabetes and cholestasis, a disease affecting the liver. She also had low amniotic fluid and had to give birth earlier than expected, at 37 weeks of pregnancy.

At birth, Elsie weighed only 2.1 kg. Although the placenta initially showed some irregularities, further testing confirmed — according to the gynecologist — that everything was normal. The newborn's doctor therefore decided that, due to her low weight and her mother's cholestasis, Elsie would benefit from the follow-up with a pediatrician for the next year to ensure that her growth was normal.

"We contacted several clinics, but couldn't find one available. Thankfully, Dr. Donlan's kind referral helped us secure a pediatrician. It was very helpful," says Elsie's father, Prakash Tirunampalli.

Today, both mother and baby are doing well. The clinic has found a family doctor for Elsie who will continue to see her when she is no longer under the care of a pediatrician.

BENEFITS FOR ALL

Since last year, Dr. Donlan has worked with St. Mary's Hospital Centre to replicate his program there. Their group led by Dr. Kim Anh Nguyen has been very successful and all babies born at St. Mary's are now given follow-up with a primary care provider as well.

Dr. Donlan has met with members of all RUISSS McGill hospitals (Montréal-Ouest, Montréal-Centre and Ouest, Outaouais, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Nord-du-Québec, Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James and Nunavik) and is in the process of launching the project in those hospitals. CHU Sainte-Justine is also considering launching the project in the coming year.

Ultimately, Dr. Donlan would like to see this community built up across the province by 2027. ❁





New ReConnect line: a valuable tool for worried parents

By Maureen McCarthy

Imagine it's the middle of the night and your child, just home from surgery, has developed a fever. You're wide awake and a lot of questions are going through your head: can I give them something for the fever, what if it gets worse, should we go to Emergency...? On the worry scale, it's a 10 out of 10.

But what if you could call the hospital and speak to a nurse, and get answers and reassurance without waiting for hours? That's the idea behind the newly-launched ReConnect phone line at the Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH) and the early feedback on the program is quickly proving its value.

Catherine Bouchard, Manager of Clinical Operations and Access to Care at the MCH, is co-lead on the new project, along with Pediatric Intensive Care Unit physician Dr. Anab Lehr. The two have worked together on other recent program developments at the MCH including the Access Care Coordination (ACC) Centre and the Pediatric

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► Above: Members of the ReConnect Line team include (l. to r.) Catherine Bouchard, Marisa Cristofaro, Sze Chan and Raymond Soriano.



► As of October 6, the ReConnect line had made 1,547 wellness check calls and received 806 incoming calls.

Transport Team, as well as patient flow. The ReConnect team also includes Sze Chan, Assistant Nurse Manager, and Jeniene Birks, Project Manager, who both have key roles in the ACC and Pediatric Transport Team as well.

"The idea for the ReConnect line is to enhance the care offered to patients who have gone home after a stay in the hospital, and hopefully reduce unnecessary emergency visits," says Catherine. "The 15-day period after going home is the most vulnerable post-discharge period and is when most problems occur; therefore that's the period covered by the ReConnect line."

The new service was officially launched on May 12 this year. Staffed by seven experienced pediatric nurses, the ReConnect line has two distinct roles: in addition to taking calls from parents and caregivers who are at home with

their child, the service's nursing staff also conduct wellness check phone calls 24 hours after patients are discharged from the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit. By October 6, the ReConnect line had completed 1,547 wellness calls and received 806 incoming calls.

FAST ACCESS TO PEDIATRIC EXPERTS

For parents calling the line, they are connected with a nurse who can access the child's file, help assess the child's symptoms and determine what to do next.

"When a parent calls the line, we triage them on the phone. We provide advice such as reminding them they can give their child acetaminophen," explains Jennifer Bailey, Nursing Pediatric Consultant, who supervises the team.

"Sometimes they say 'I'm going to come back to the hospital,' but we can

tell them to wait a few hours and see if it gets better. We tell them to call us back if needed, which is reassuring and often helps reduce their stress."

Jennifer adds they are also able to contact the child's doctor when necessary. "For example, we tell the parent we'll call them back, then get in touch with the surgeon, explain the child's problem or symptoms, and ask what should be done," she says. "Often the surgeon says, 'There's nothing to worry about, I'll see them at their follow-up appointment' or 'Have them come to clinic the next day'. In some instances, they say the child needs to go to Emergency right away. We call the parents back immediately to let them know what to do."

With access to the Québec Medical Appointment Scheduler, the ReConnect staff can also assist parents by setting up appointments in the community for follow-up if they don't need to be seen at the hospital.

The ReConnect wait times are generally short and there's a message letting the caller know approximately how long it will be before they speak to a nurse.

PERSONALIZED ADVICE

Alexandra Macdonald is one parent who has used the ReConnect line. Her son Logan Vaillancourt recently underwent a day procedure in General Surgery.

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"We picked up Logan's prescription from the pharmacy, but that night at home, we noticed what was written on the bottle was not what I recalled being on the prescription. Obviously the pharmacy had kept the paper so I called the ReConnect line," she says.

"I didn't wait at all, they were super helpful. They explained the differences and why there was a higher concentration of one of the drugs, so he'd be taking less than what I remembered seeing on the prescription. They were super friendly and eased all my stress about everything."



She adds that the next day, a ReConnect line nurse called to see how Logan was doing after the surgery and if she had any questions.

"Before leaving the hospital after Logan's surgery, the nurses obviously explained everything, but there's so much going on, that sometimes it's hard to remember everything. So the follow-up call really helps. It's really an exceptional service."

Catherine points out that the ReConnect team's nursing expertise is very important to the service's success.

"We're making changes constantly, either because we're picking up on problems or realize something is not entirely efficient and we need to change it," she says. "So we need everyone's input on the service and we have a great team in place who do that."

The ACC, which handles calls and requests between referring physicians and staff at the MCH, served as a model for setting up the ReConnect line and staff from both services work alongside each other in an office in the Emergency Department (ED).

REACHING MORE PEOPLE

"Although still in the early stages, we expect that, in time, there might be reductions in Emergency visits by

patients who have been discharged," says Catherine.

So far, among the families surveyed who have used the ReConnect line, 135 (25 per cent of users) reported that without the service, they would have gone directly to the ED. Of these cases, the ReConnect nurses directed only 57 families to the ED, resulting in at least 78 ED visits avoided.

There are also plans to eventually expand the service to other areas of the hospital such as inpatient units, the Birthing Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital and even certain categories of patients from the Emergency.

The ReConnect line is definitely well positioned to meet these goals. "The team is amazing and the feedback we're getting from families is really, really good," says Jennifer.

She adds that many parents are very grateful to have a trained pediatric nurse available to them. "To know that there's someone they can call multiple times, even in the middle of the night, is very reassuring."

The ReConnect line received financial support from the Institut de la pertinence des actes médicaux, an initiative of the Quebec government and the Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec. ❁

► Logan Vaillancourt waits to go into the operating room for a surgical procedure. His mother, Alexandra, later called the ReConnect line from home to verify details about her son's post-surgery medication.



Fall brings plenty of excitement to the MCH

By Caroline Fabre

This fall, things have been anything but quiet at the Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH)! As the leaves are falling outside, our hallways are busy with surprise visits from star athletes, a magical concert and interesting activities, bringing together patients, families and staff members. Here are just a few highlights that have made it so memorable.

Mid-September, the Concordia University women's basketball team, the Stingers, brought its contagious energy to the MCH. As they visited different floors, the players gave out gifts, shared jokes, offered a few basketball tips and tricks and even shot some hoops with our patients



Sporting their huge smiles, the players from the Montreal Alouettes football team shared high-fives with the children, threw the ball around and even sang "Happy Birthday" to one of our patients who was celebrating her 18th birthday the day of their visit. The team also brought along mini footballs, signed posters and a special book celebrating their 2023 Grey Cup victory, gifts that made kids happy.



As part of Journées de la culture, artists Kerry Bursey (tenor and lute) and Rosalie Lane-Lépine (mezzo-soprano) treated our patients, families and staff to a program of baroque songs in the P.K. Subban Atrium. Their music included a beautiful selection of Italian monodies, French court airs, English lute songs and Spanish tonadas.



Our Family Resource Centre hosted a special kiosk in recognition of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Families had the chance to explore resources, discover books by Indigenous authors, enjoy colouring activities and even take part in a Cree language mini-workshop.

For Fire Prevention Week, our Child Life Department and School Services teams welcomed the Service de sécurité incendie de Montréal for an exciting afternoon. Firefighters brought an impressive fire truck to the MCH and invited our little patients to climb aboard, try on a helmet and learn about fire safety. Mascot Chef and a couple of firefighters then went to the different floors to pay a visit to those who couldn't go outside, giving them little firefighter helmets.

