

Genetic Counsellor Awareness Day

November 13th, 2025

Genetic Counsellor Awareness Day Featuring: Alex White-Brown



Alex White-Brown has been a genetic counsellor at CHEO since April 2024. His clinical role focuses on prenatal and neurogenetics counselling. He also plays an instrumental role in several research initiatives, including the ThinkRare project, which applies cutting-edge AI technology within the electronic medical record to improve rare disease detection and diagnosis.

“What I find most rewarding about being a genetic counsellor is the ability to bridge the worlds of research and clinical care. I’m deeply motivated by the opportunity to bring emerging genomic discoveries and innovative technologies to the forefront of clinical care, transforming research insights into real-world answers for patients and families.”

Genetic Counsellor Awareness Day Featuring: Erika Smith



Erika Smith has been a genetic counsellor at CHEO since 2004. She is the Genetic Counsellor lead of the Hereditary Cancer Program and a clinical genetic counsellor. She is also an active member of the Profyle research team which conducts molecular profiling on blood and tumours samples from children as a precision medicine tool to learn more about their cancers and try to find treatment options for each individual patient.

What she finds most rewarding about genetic counselling is *"being able to empower patients to make the right decisions for them pertaining to genetic testing. It is a privilege to be involved with cancer patients to explain their genetic test result, how results pertain to their care and the implications for the family members."*

Genetic Counsellor Awareness Day Featuring: Taila Hartley



Taila Hartley has been a genetic counsellor at the Research Institute since 2013. She received her PhD in 2023. Dr. Hartley is the operations director for Care4Rare Canada, a network of clinicians and scientists devoted to improving diagnostic care for families living with Rare Diseases. Dr. Hartley is also the co-primary investigator on a large (\$1.4 Million) CIHR funded grant called Knowledge 2 Action for Rare Diseases (K2A-RD) which links families, scientists, clinicians, and policymakers to improve access to genomics.

“What inspires me most is helping families find answers that once felt out of reach. Genetic counselling gives us the tools to turn complex science into compassionate care.”

Genetic Counsellor Awareness Day Featuring: Brigitte Belanger



Brigitte has been a genetic counsellor at CHEO since 2015. She has held various clinical and laboratory positions within Newborn Screening Ontario and the Regional Genetics Program, working currently with the prenatal and general genetics populations.

What she finds most rewarding about genetic counselling is *being able to accompany the patients through their journey and taking the time to give them valuable genetics and medical information that are important to them, sometimes during very stressful times.*

At the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), genetic counsellors (GCs) play a pivotal role in providing comprehensive genetic services across various specialized clinics, provincial programs and research initiatives. Many GCs are in leadership positions bringing their transferrable skills to these new roles. In all scenarios, GCs are valuable members of multidisciplinary teams working with geneticists, family physicians, policy makers, scientists and more.



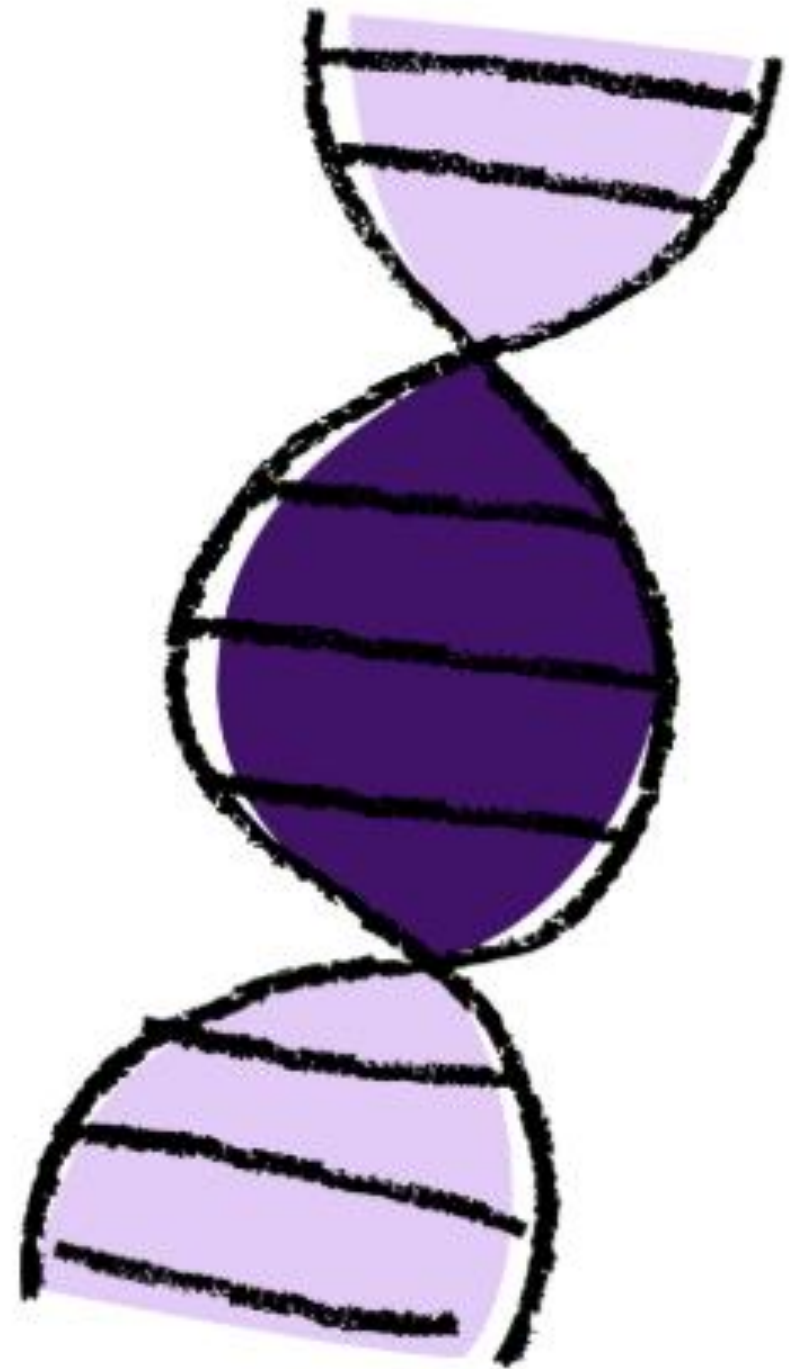


Genetics Clinic (Total number of GCs = 16)

Genetic counsellors offer personalized consultations to individuals and families, guiding them through genetic health information, testing options, decision-making, interpreting results, and discussing implications for one's health and their relatives. They provide counselling across the life span from preconception to adult, including prenatal and hereditary cancer services.

Genetics Diagnostic Laboratory (total number of GCs=3)

Laboratory Genetic counsellors are integral to the Genetics Diagnostic Laboratory at CHEO, ensuring that complex genetic testing is accessible and clinically meaningful. They review and triage test requests, collaborate with laboratory staff on variant interpretation, and draft patient-centered reports for healthcare providers. The lab GCs also liaise with clinicians to guide appropriate test selection and provide education on genomic technologies. Through these roles, these genetic counsellors bridge the gap between advanced genomic testing and patient care, ensuring families receive accurate, timely and meaningful results.





Genome-wide Sequencing Ontario (total number of GCs = 4)

Genome-wide Sequencing Ontario is a partnership between SickKids and CHEO to provide clinical genome-wide sequencing in Ontario. From the beginning of the pilot design, genetic counsellors have been integral members of the GSO team and have played key roles in driving many aspects of the program including liaising with funders, stakeholders and end-users, clinical and laboratory workflow setup and optimization, policy-making, development of patient and provider resources, GWS reporting practices and so much more. In addition to those program management responsibilities, GCs review and initiate test requests for genome-wide sequencing, respond to provider inquiries, analyze the genome-wide sequencing data, and draft result reports.

Newborn Screening Ontario (Total number of GCs = 6)

Newborn Screening Ontario (NSO) is a provincial program that screens all babies for rare but serious conditions where early detection can significantly improve outcomes. Genetic counsellors at NSO are integral to the program, applying their expertise to interpret complex genetic results, contribute to research and policy development, and lead innovative initiatives in screening.



Research Institute (Total number of GCs = 3)

At the CHEO Research Institute, genetic counsellors play an important role in advancing pediatric health research. Their contributions span a wide range of activities, including study design, data analysis, grant writing, and manuscript preparation. Many are also deeply involved in project operations and management, ensuring research initiatives run smoothly and effectively. Beyond the lab, genetic counsellors help translate complex research findings into accessible information for researchers, clinicians, and the public alike – raising awareness for important results and building connections for future collaborations.

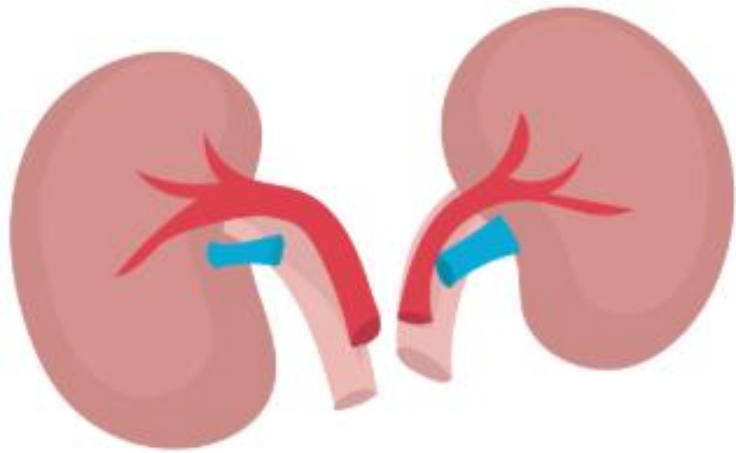


Genetics Education Canada: Knowledge Organization (GECKO) (Number of GCs = 1)

At GECKO, genetic counsellors have been integral to the management and everyday operations of the program since 2011. GCs lead the development of educational resources including point of care tools and deliver educational sessions, that support the integration of genomic medicine into the clinical practice of non-genomics clinicians, particularly primary care.

www.geneticseducation.ca





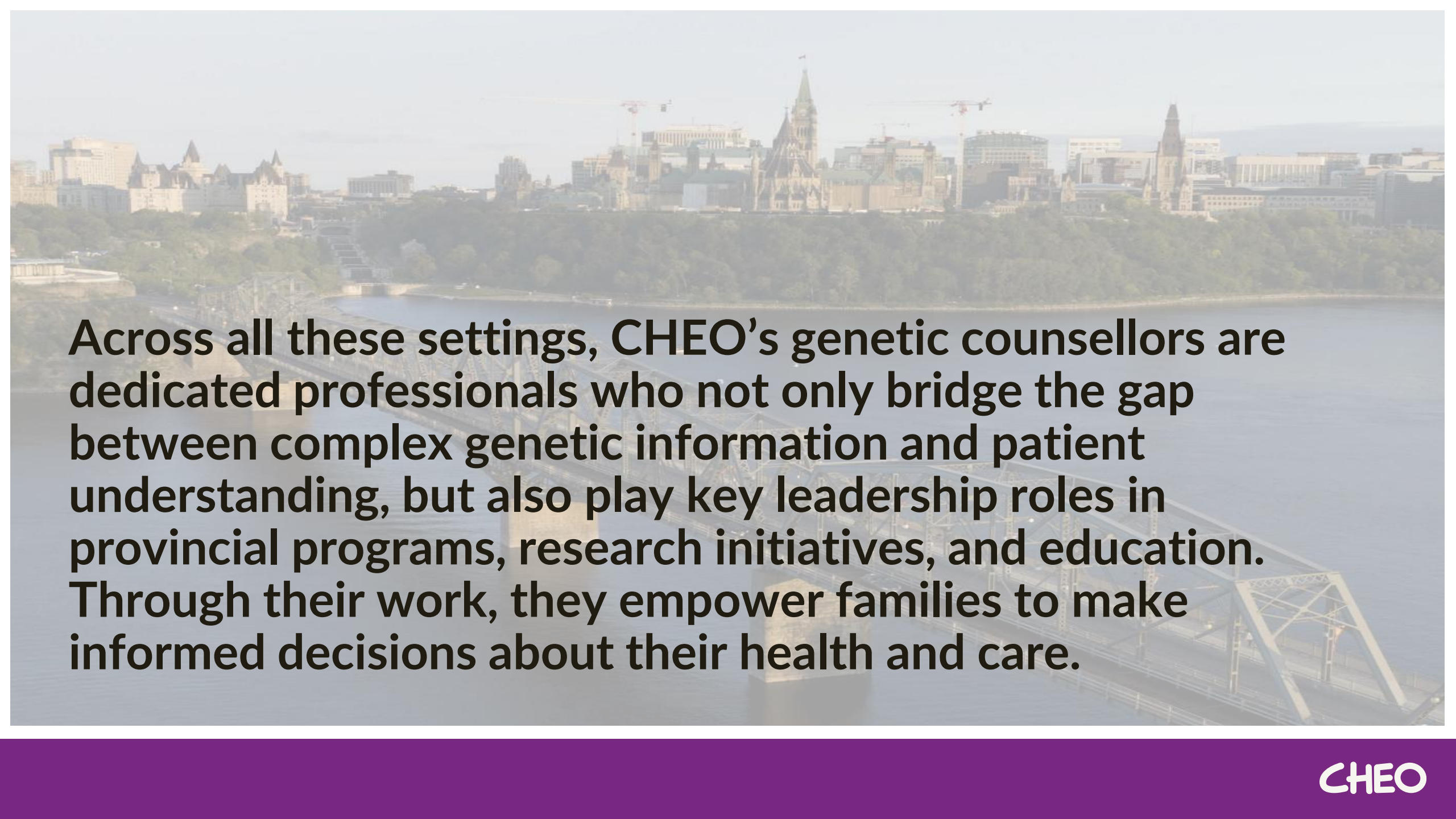
Nephrology Genetics Clinic (Number of GCs = 1)

This is a collaboration between CHEO and the Ottawa Hospital (TOH) to bring genetics services to adult patients being seen in Nephrology at the Riverside Campus and improve access to genetic counselling and genetic testing. A clinical team of one dedicated genetic counsellor and one nephrologist offers consultations to patients referred by other nephrologist colleagues to investigate the possibility of genetic kidney disease.

Genetic Counsellors in Leadership

Across CHEO genetic counsellors have confidently and competently stepped into leadership roles such as managers at BORN and NSO, to program leaders at GECKO and the RI, to the director of Director of Precision Health, Laboratory Medicine and the Regional Genetics Program.



An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Montreal, Quebec, Canada, viewed from across a body of water. The city features a mix of historic architecture, including a prominent cathedral with a tall spire, and modern buildings. A large bridge with a complex steel truss structure spans the water in the foreground. The background shows rolling hills and distant mountains under a clear sky.

Across all these settings, CHEO's genetic counsellors are dedicated professionals who not only bridge the gap between complex genetic information and patient understanding, but also play key leadership roles in provincial programs, research initiatives, and education. Through their work, they empower families to make informed decisions about their health and care.