

# **Who runs the world? YOUTH!**

**An interview with CanWaCH's  
2018 Youth Advocacy Award  
Recipient, Brianna Cheng**



**LEAD ON CANADA**



**CanWaCH**

Canadian Partnership for  
Women and Children's Health



**Can you tell me how you first became interested in youth advocacy & empowerment, and how you got your start in the field of global health?**

It was a combination of catalyzing factors. My group of peers and mentors provided a supportive foray into the global health community, and my interest was further cemented through a service-learning experience in New Orleans. Connecting the classroom theory and real-world context about sustainable development was an eye-opening experience. It compelled me to continue learning about diverse global health disciplines throughout my studies, my institutional work with CCGHR, and challenged me to learn about the needs of my community through working with people with exceptionalities.

## It's that time again...

NOMINATIONS ARE OPEN FOR THE **SECOND ANNUAL CANWACH AWARDS!** TO CELEBRATE THIS MILESTONE WE SAT DOWN WITH **BRIANNA CHENG** TO EXPLORE CANADIAN LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL HEALTH.

BRIANNA IS CURRENTLY PURSUING A MASTERS OF SCIENCE IN EPIDEMIOLOGY DEGREE FROM MCGILL UNIVERSITY. HER PASSION FOR IMPROVING HEALTH EQUITY IN COMMUNITIES LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY, ESPECIALLY AMONG AT-RISK POPULATIONS, IS REFLECTED THROUGH HER CONSISTENT AND INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP EFFORTS. WHEN SHE WAS AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT, BRIANNA WAS EXTENSIVELY INVOLVED IN GROWING THE FIRST STUDENT CHAPTER OF THE **CANADIAN COALITION FOR GLOBAL HEALTH RESEARCH (CCGHR)**. SHE SOUGHT TO ADVANCE DIALOGUE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN THROUGH THE GLOBAL HEALTH AGORA, A NOVEL INTER-PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM. HER MENTORSHIP HAS HELPED TO GUIDE NEW CCGHR CHAPTERS THAT HAVE SINCE EXPANDED ACROSS CANADA.





## What are you currently doing in terms of school, work or volunteer activities?

Spearheading various global health initiatives, such as The Global Health Agora, during my undergrad has led me to further explore social innovation. I am currently involved with the **Community Health and Social Medicine Incubator (CHASM)**, which is McGill's only incubator scaling health ideas that address problems facing marginalized populations in Montréal. We provide funding, mentorship, and an educational curriculum to locally engaged student projects. It's been interesting to learn how business models can be applied to health problems to create tangible change. Working with diverse stakeholders has been particularly rewarding. It's so true that communities are at the heart of solving "glo-cal" health issues.

## CanWaCH has just opened nominations for its second annual awards, including the category for young leaders like you. Did winning this award change your approach or perspective to the work you do? If so, how?

Through winning this award, I had the special privilege of meeting other youth delegates at the **Beyond 2020 CanWaCH conference**. That was very exciting. I've gotten a taste of the scale at which Canadians, young and old, share a united vision for improving global women and children's health. This momentum continues to inspire and motivate me to remain focused on my career goals. I have also since gained a better appreciation for the importance of mentorship in a global context. Nurturing the largest generation of adolescents and their leadership skills will help to shape a more equitable world as defined by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

**As you probably know, Canada is hosting Women Deliver 2019, the largest conference on gender equality and the health, rights and wellbeing of girls & women in the 21st century. What do you think are some of the main successes Canada should highlight and show the world as part of this conference?**

Indigenous women and girls are still disproportionately affected by violence in Canada. However, Canada has made some progress in the past few years. Since launching the **National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women** and Girls, Canada has increased funding to provide continued health and victim supports to affected families after the Inquiry ends. They have also committed financial resources to strengthen partnerships between law enforcement and the Indigenous communities that they serve. I hope Canada will share with the rest of the world about their initiatives in reconciliation and solidarity as an important step towards achieving gender equality. The conversations are not always easy, but Canada is in a position to show the world that change can occur -- one conversation at a time.

**Do you have any advice for young women who are interested in getting involved in this type of work?**

From a career-planning standpoint, I think it's important to be aware that global health is a burgeoning interdisciplinary field; the global health challenges today go beyond the delivery of healthcare, including communications, governance, and finance (Dr. Greg Martin's **video series** gives a good overview of this). So, be empowered by that. Take the time to shadow mentors and discover how people similar to your background have leveraged their skills to work in the global health space.



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