UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

To: Staff in the Research and Innovation portfolio
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UTSC Campus Council
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Presidents of APUS, GSU, SCSU, UTMSU and UTSU

From: Melanie Woodin, President

Date: November 6, 2026

Re: **Reappointment of Professor Leah Cowen as Vice-President, Research and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives**

I am pleased to announce that the Governing Council has approved the reappointment of Professor Leah Cowen as Vice-President, Research and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives (VP RISI). Professor Cowen's second term will be for five-years over a five-and-a-half-year period, from January 1, 2027 to June 30, 2032.

During Professor Leah Cowen's first term as Vice-President, RISI, the University of Toronto has continued to strengthen its position as one of the world's leading research-intensive universities. Under her leadership, the University developed its *Institutional Strategic Research Plan 2024–2029*, establishing a shared vision and strategic priorities for research and innovation across the institution. The University has also achieved significant success in securing research funding, with the University and its affiliated hospital partners receiving approximately $1.7 billion in research funding in 2024–25. Major competitive research investments during this period have included nearly $200 million through the Canada First Research Excellence Fund for the Acceleration Consortium, the largest research grant in the University's history, as well as substantial additional investments in biomedical research, artificial intelligence and other emerging areas.

The University's Institutional Strategic Initiatives have also continued to evolve, strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration and creating opportunities for researchers across a range of disciplines to pursue ambitious initiatives with government, industry, hospital and community partners. The Institutional Strategic Initiatives portfolio

leverages the University’s research strengths in the humanities and social sciences alongside research in technology, health, and public policy to support initiatives such as the School of Cities, the Lawson Climate Institute, the Schwartz Reisman Institute for Technology and Society, and others.

During Professor Cowen's tenure, the University's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem has continued to grow, reflecting its position as a leading centre for research-based innovation and venture creation. Members of the University community have established more than 1,800 venture-backed startups, with University-associated startups raising more than $27 billion in investment and creating more than 27,000 jobs over the past five years. This period has also seen expanded opportunities for commercialization, entrepreneurial programming and partnerships that support the translation of research discoveries into societal and economic impact. Across the research and innovation portfolio, important progress has been made in providing opportunities for professional development, improving access to shared research facilities and advanced computing resources, modernizing research administration, and strengthening institutional capacity to respond to increasingly complex research security and regulatory requirements. Together, these developments have contributed to a research and innovation environment that supports scholars across all three campus and the University's affiliated hospitals in pursuing discovery, innovation and impact.

Professor Cowen is an internationally recognized researcher in microbial genomics and infectious disease, and a Professor in the Department of Molecular Genetics in the Temerty Faculty of Medicine. A Canada Research Chair in Microbial Genomics and Infectious Disease since 2007, her interdisciplinary research focuses on understanding how fungal pathogens cause disease and develop resistance to treatment, and on advancing new therapeutic approaches to combat life-threatening infections. Her research has been recognized through numerous prestigious awards, including the Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Award in the Biomedical Sciences, the Merck Irving S. Sigal Memorial Award, the E.W.R. Steacie Award and the Grand Challenges Canada Star in Global Health Award. She is an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, American Academy of Microbiology and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Professor Cowen has also demonstrated a strong commitment to translating research discoveries into practical applications as Co-Founder and Chief Scientific Officer of Bright Angel Therapeutics, a biotechnology company focused on developing novel antifungal treatments.

Professor Cowen received her undergraduate degree from the University of British Columbia and her PhD from the University of Toronto, followed by postdoctoral research at the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She joined the University of Toronto's Department of Molecular Genetics as an Assistant Professor in 2007 and subsequently served as Associate Chair and, from 2016 to 2021, as Chair of the Department. In 2021, she was appointed the University's first Associate Vice-President, Research, before assuming her current

role as Vice-President, Research and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives in January 2022. Throughout her academic career, Professor Cowen has combined internationally recognized scholarship with a commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration, research innovation, mentorship and academic leadership.

I look forward to continuing to work with Professor Cowen as a member of the President's Leadership Team and am deeply grateful for the outstanding leadership she has provided to date.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who provided feedback as part of the review process, and the members of the Advisory Committee for their thoughtful advice and guidance.