



**To:** Staff in the Research and Innovation Portfolio  
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President, University of Toronto Alumni Association (UTAA)

**From:** Professor Meric Gertler, President

**Date:** December 16, 2021

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

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I am very pleased to announce that the Governing Council has approved the appointment of Professor Leah Cowen as Vice-President, Research and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives, for a five-year term, effective January 1, 2022 until December 31, 2026.

The Advisory Committee on the Vice-President, Research and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives, which I chaired, undertook a comprehensive international search. Based on the criteria articulated in the [position profile](#), we determined that Professor Leah Cowen was exceptionally well qualified for the position.

Professor Leah Cowen - an expert on infectious fungal diseases - is the University of Toronto's first Associate Vice-President, Research, and a Professor of Molecular Genetics in the Temerty Faculty of Medicine. In her role, she collaborates with leaders of academic divisions and U of T's Research Advisory Board to enable research excellence and impact. She also works with U of T's Centre for Research Innovation and Support to develop mentoring opportunities and workshops for faculty members, and she supports the development of a university-wide infrastructure roadmap across its three campuses. Professor Cowen is also Co-Director of the CIFAR program "Fungal Kingdom: Threats & Opportunities" and Co-Founder and Chief Scientific Officer of the biotechnology firm Bright Angel Therapeutics.

Professor Cowen brings an outstanding track record of inter-disciplinary scholarship, high-impact research and teaching excellence, and a proven record of knowledge translation and entrepreneurship. A Canada Research Chair in Microbial Genomics and Infectious Disease, Professor Cowen uses specialized genomics technology to examine how fungal pathogens become resistant to drugs and cause human disease. Throughout her career, she has secured over \$30 million in funding, and received numerous awards in recognition of her work, including the Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Award, Grand Challenges Canada Star in Global Health Award, Merck Irving S. Sigal Memorial Award, and the E.W.R. Steacie Award. She has also been elected as Fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology and Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Professor Cowen received her undergraduate degree from the University of British Columbia and her PhD from U of T before pursuing post-doctoral studies at the Whitehead Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She returned to U of T in 2007 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Molecular Genetics, eventually rising to the rank of Full Professor and Chair of the Department in 2016, where she led a vibrant, productive, and diverse scholarly community, fostered innovation, advanced research performance, and grew academic partnerships and programs.

We very much look forward to Professor Cowen joining the vice-presidential team.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the [Advisory Committee](#) for their involvement in this critical process and for their thoughtful advice and guidance.