

Cochlear Implants in Montreal: *The story of a dream becoming reality*



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In the field of ear surgery and hearing rehabilitation, no innovation comes close to cochlear implantation in terms of quality of life improvement. The development of this technology in the 1980s and its implantation in millions of deaf children and adults over the last 40 years, has changed the profile of deafness in the world.

History of cochlear implantation in Quebec

The first cochlear implant in Canada was performed by Dr Melvin Schloss at the Montreal Children's Hospital in the early 1980s. In 1987, under a government mandate to concentrate the expertise of this emerging ear surgery, l'Hôtel Dieu de Québec and the Institut de réadaptation en déficience physique de Québec (IRDQP) joined forces and founded the Québec Cochlear Implant program.

For more than 30 years, Quebec City was the sole site where cochlear implant surgeries could be performed. It ensured that expertise was developed in the use of this new technology.

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Over the years, as cochlear implantation was becoming a standard otologic procedure offered in most university centers across the world, fellowship-trained otologists and neurotologists skilled in cochlear implantation surgeries returned to practice in several centers in the Greater Montreal area. Attempts to establish a Montreal Cochlear Implant program have failed several times over the years to finally succeed in 2018 under a patient-led initiative pioneered by William Steinberg, a double cochlear implant recipient and the mayor of Hampstead, and supported by McGill University and University of Montreal Otolaryngology departments.

The pleas for greater access to care closer to home for the hard of hearing population, already challenged in their capacity to navigate the healthcare system, was finally heard by the CAQ government and the process of establishing a western pole (point of service) for cochlear implantation was started in 2019. The efforts were slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the team was able to get back on track and welcome the first cochlear implant patients at the MUHC in October 2022.

The Western Pole of the Quebec Cochlear Implant Program

The McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), with its partners, has become the second cochlear implant point of service in Quebec. The hearing impaired and deaf population, living in the western part of the province, both adult and pediatric, can now be treated in Montreal by a full team of bilingual hearing professionals. The Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre of the CIUSSS Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal and the Centre de réadaptation en déficience physique Raymond-Dewar (IRD) of the CIUSSS Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal are the MUHC's partners in the care pathway for patients living in the western



Many of our Members are on the waiting list to receive their Cochlear Implant

part of the province. Otolaryngologists from the University of Montreal will also be joining the McGill team of surgeons in the care of cochlear implant candidates at the MUHC.

In terms of organization, for children and adults, the medical component (evaluation, surgery and medical follow-ups), the initial intensive programming and the programming follow-ups during the first twelve months are provided by the MUHC cochlear implant team. Specifically, children are cared for at the Montreal Children's Hospital and adults are cared for at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

After the first year, programming follow-ups are provided by the Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre or by the IRD, based on the patients' language of preference. Intensive functional rehabilitation following surgery is provided by the rehabilitation center in the patient's region or by one of the rehabilitation centers mentioned above, if the regional rehabilitation center does not offer this service.



1st MUHC Adult cochlear implant clinic held on Oct 28th 2022
(From left to right)

Marjolaine Couture – CI Audiologist
Dr Emily Kay-Rivest Otolaryngologist
Dr Tamara Mijovic Otolaryngologist
François Prevost Audiologist and Coordinator of the Western Pole Cochlear Implant Program

To get an appointment with the MUHC cochlear implant team, the application must still be sent to the Quebec Cochlear Implant Program's provincial office located in Quebec City. This emphasizes that there is still one single Cochlear Implantation Program in Quebec with two points of care (the western pole in Montreal and the eastern pole in Quebec City) that apply the same candidacy evaluation criteria and have an overall equivalent approach to care. The development of two points of care is an immense win for the Quebec population who will not only benefit from care closer to home, but will also see a reduction in wait times for implantation as the process has led to an overall increase in the number of cochlear implants offered in the province of Quebec.



Looking into the future

The first cochlear implant candidates were welcomed for evaluation at the MUHC in October 2022 and we are aiming to perform the first surgeries in January 2023. Behind the scene, a colossal amount of teamwork within the MUHC and instrumental collaborations with our partners were necessary to make this dream a reality. We are very proud of what the western pole has accomplished so far. We look forward to collaborating with the eastern pole and advocating together for the enlargement of selection criteria to allow an even wider patient population to benefit from the wonders of cochlear implantation.



William Steinberg was born with severe hearing loss which he overcame with cochlear implants that he received in 2004 & 2018. In 2019, **Hear Quebec** recognized him with the “**Hearing Hear’os Award**”, given to an individual who has had when a positive impact on the hearing health community, for his efforts as the former Mayor of the Town of Hampstead to persuade the Quebec Government to perform cochlear implant surgeries in Montreal. He is currently the President of the Cochlear Implant Recipients Association.