

Announcing YWCA Toronto's 2025 Women of Distinction Award Recipients

Determined to advance equity, social justice and inclusion

TORONTO, March 6, 2025 – In advance of International Women's Day, YWCA Toronto is thrilled to announce the names of six remarkable women who will be honoured and celebrated at our 44th Women of Distinction Awards in May. Women of Distinction Award recipients are change-makers determined to advance equity, social justice and inclusion.

Our 2025 YWCA Toronto Women of Distinction award recipients are **Dr. Aditi Sivakumar** (Young Woman of Distinction), **Nancy Barber** (Corporate Leadership), **Carly Kalish** (Social Justice), **Farrah Khan** (Activism), **Deqa Nur** (Community Leadership) and **Dr. Paula Rochon** (Health).

"'Accelerate Action' is the 2025 International Women's Day campaign theme. For YWCA Toronto, accelerating action aligns with our steadfast commitment to a societal transformation in order to empower women, girls and gender diverse people. Through our programs, services and advocacy we help break systemic barriers and further the momentum of the YWCA global movement," says YWCA Toronto's Chief Executive Officer, Heather McGregor. "Now, more than ever, we are also deeply committed to celebrating the successes of gender equity champions in our community. I hope you will join us on May 27 at our annual Women of Distinction Awards. It is sure to be an inspiring evening spent honouring six extraordinary women."

The Women of Distinction Awards is YWCA Toronto's largest annual fundraising event. Proceeds from this event directly support YWCA Toronto programs and wrap around services which help women, girls and gender diverse people secure housing, heal and build sustainable futures. The event will be held on Tuesday, May 27 at the historic [Liberty Grand](#).

Award recipients are available for exclusive interviews through YWCA Toronto's office.

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YWCA Toronto's 2025 Women of Distinction

DR. ADITI SIVAKUMAR (Young Woman of Distinction)

Dr. Aditi Sivakumar is a resident doctor, and a dedicated women's rights advocate, elevating the voices of systemically marginalized communities.

After witnessing the devastating effects of gender-based violence through her undergraduate volunteer work at a local domestic violence shelter in Ottawa, Dr. Sivakumar knew she needed to act. In 2018, she launched My Empowerment Platform, an easily accessible web application dedicated to providing women and girls facing violence with the information they need to find safety. This impressive endeavor took on new importance during the pandemic when many women were trapped at home with their abusers and experiencing increased violence. [\[Read more...\]](#)

NANCY BARBER (Corporate Leadership)

Nancy Barber has spent her career blazing a trail for women in the aerospace industry. Starting as an intern at Bombardier, she navigated the male-dominated field and became the company's first female Chief Operating Officer, where she was responsible for delivering the largest Business Aircraft Program in the industry.

Now serving as Senior Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer at De Havilland Canada and President of Women in Aerospace Canada (WIA-Canada), Nancy is committed to opening doors for the next generation of women and gender diverse professionals. [\[Read more...\]](#)

CARLY KALISH (Social Justice)

Carly Kalish is a champion for survivors of human trafficking. Early in her professional career, as a trauma therapist at East Metro Youth Services (EMYS), she saw just how pressing and underrecognized the human trafficking was in Toronto. She became a critical ally and counsellor for hundreds of girls and women – many of whom were unaware of the crimes being perpetrated against them. Her knowledge of exploitation and tireless efforts to improve support services led to the formation of an anti-human trafficking coalition of 30 community partners. [\[Read more...\]](#)

FARRAH KHAN (Activism)

Farrah Khan is a globally recognized expert on gender justice. For over two decades, she has worked at the intersections of frontline support, policy innovation, public education, art creation and youth mentorship to create systemic change.

At 16, Farrah began developing the BRAVE Model©, a groundbreaking trauma-informed peer support framework. Since then, she has trained over 100,000 people to respond to sexual violence with compassion and responsibility. Farrah continues to innovate and enhance survivor-centred healing and violence prevention education across the country. [\[Read more...\]](#)

DEQA NUR (Community Leadership)

Deqa Nur is a strong advocate for social justice, economic inclusion and local, community driven decision-making.

A proud Somali-Canadian herself, Deqa saw mothers in her community struggling, often overlooked and unable to find supportive services and programs that met their needs. In response, she founded Hooyo Innovation Hub ("Hooyo" meaning "mother" in Somali), an organization dedicated to helping Somali-Canadian mothers build strong economic futures for themselves and their families through capacity building programming. [\[Read more...\]](#)

DR. PAULA ROCHON (Health)

Dr. Paula Rochon is a geriatrician and the Founding Director of Women's Age Lab at Women's College Hospital, the first lab in the world focused on improving the health and wellbeing of women as they age—an area long overlooked. As the Retired Teachers of Ontario Chair in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Toronto and former Vice President of Research at Women's College Hospital, she has spent her career transforming women's healthcare.

Dr. Rochon's work has made a profound impact, informing the development of evidence-based interventions that address the unique health needs of aging women. [\[Read more...\]](#)