



One day in 2012, Jennifer Monaghan was speaking to her husband when, suddenly, no words came out. She thought she had just lost her voice. But her husband recognized the signs of stroke and called 9-1-1. Minutes later, Jennifer, then 43, lost control of the right side of her body and fell to the floor.

“I had no idea what a stroke was and didn’t understand for several days that I’d had a stroke,” recalls the former lawyer and mother of two. Although her husband’s quick thinking ensured that Jennifer got timely care, she needed intensive therapy to regain her speech.

To this day, the stroke still impacts her cognitive abilities. Plus, despite having no risk factors for heart disease or stroke, she’s been diagnosed with heart failure.

### **Helping others, helping herself**

Jennifer eventually found a new way forward — getting involved to help other people with stroke. Two years after her stroke, she helped launch an eight-week Living With Stroke support program at her local library in Kelowna, BC, on behalf of Heart & Stroke.

“I had to run around and get organized. Every small step that I had to go through to get involved, it was like therapy for me,” Jennifer recalls of setting up that program in 2014. “It challenged me. I was helping others but I was very much helping myself at the same time.”

From there, Jennifer kept volunteering. She became a hospital peer stroke visitor, connecting with patients and caregivers in her community. And she shares sage advice as a member of the Heart & Stroke online [Community of Survivors](#).

Besides supporting individuals and families, Jennifer has become a patient advocate, bringing the voice of her lived experience to help address social, geographic and gender inequities in stroke care, including raising awareness of the disparities in stroke outcomes for women.

She’s served as co-author on published studies about the patient experience, does strategic planning with the B.C. Interior Health Authority and has worked on numerous projects with Heart & Stroke and organizations such as the Canadian Women’s Heart Health Alliance.

### **A new honour**

Jennifer was selected for the honour of delivering the inaugural Louise and Frank Nieboer Lecture at the Ottawa Stroke Summit on Nov. 26, 2021. The lecture recognizes

people affected by stroke who have used their personal experiences to actively improve the journey for others. It is named for Calgary's Louise and Frank Nieboer, tireless advocates for stroke patients and families for more than 30 years.

"Jennifer is just always willing to serve," says Dr. Patrice Lindsay, director of health systems at Heart & Stroke. "She never says no, and brings incredible insights and intelligence to all the work she does."

But Jennifer still sees patient advocacy as her own take on rehabilitation therapy.

"At first, I could not accept that I would not get back to normal," she says. "Eventually I came to realize it would be a new normal. So I decided that having a stroke would not slow me down."