Stephanie Caligiuri is one of four recipients of the 2017 University of Manitoba Distinguished Dissertation Award for “The reduction of hypertension through dietary flaxseed intervention and the identification of oxylipins as therapeutic targets in cardiovascular disease.” The award selection is based on the originality, significance and impact of the student’s research.

“Science and medical research can be an exciting and rewarding endeavour, although it can at times be a disheartening and disappointing adventure. Our goal is to help patients and cure disease, and when our projects do not succeed as planned, we feel as though we have failed our patients,” says Caligiuri. “By receiving this award, it is a testament to continue on my journey of searching for answers and cures. This award is a push from my home province to never give up. I receive this as a message that the University of Manitoba is behind me and to keep searching for solutions to the unanswered questions.”

An early interest in Canada's Food Guide led Stephanie to the Human Nutritional Sciences program at the University of Manitoba. “Food is either a potent medicine or our slow poison, and there is something powerful about taking control of our health with food,” explains Caligiuri. “My graduate research focused upon nutrition, and kidney and heart disease. I currently am in Dr. Paul Kenny’s lab at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, looking at the influence of the brain in regards to alcohol, tobacco, and food addiction. The reason I pursued this area of research is because the most difficult area to tackle as a nutritionist is behaviour modification and addictions. Addiction to alcohol, cigarettes, and unhealthy foods were the top reasons our patients were at a high risk of many diseases. People often would express their feelings of helplessness in regard to battling their addictions. So I chose to be a part of the tipping point that could change the way we approach addictions in medicine.”

Caligiuri took this participative approach to the community, creating and overseeing a Hypertension Awareness Team throughout her PhD. Her team held clinics throughout the city, educating the public on identifying the risks of hypertension. The program still continues today, despite her temporary leave from the province.