

Major study seeks to unlock mysteries of aging

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(Special)-A recently announced long-term study of 50,000 Canadians seeks to unlock the mysteries of aging.

The federal government will provide \$30 million in funding for the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), which is being undertaken by a multi-disciplinary research team comprising more than 160 researchers from 26 universities across the country.

The study will follow 50,000 Canadians, aged 45 to 85 years at the time of recruitment, over the next two decades. Researchers will collect information on the changing biological, medical, psychological, social and economic aspects of the participants' lives. The design and extended follow-up of the study will enable the study team to look at more than a brief snapshot of the adult Canadian population and to critically examine health transitions and trajectories over a longer-term period.

In addition to starting at mid-life, this is the first study of its kind to collect social and economical retirement factors, as well as clinical and biological measures. While more than 70 longitudinal studies have taken place worldwide, most have focused on only one condition or on people over 65 years of age.

"Aging is a reality for all Canadians. Still, very little is known about how and why we age the way we do," said Dr. Anne Martin-Matthews, scientific director at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

"The CLSA brings together the capacity, knowledge and expertise to unlock some of the greatest mysteries of aging and to identify the social and biological factors that have the most impact on our health over time."

The study is a collaboration reflecting the work of Principal Investigators Dr. Parminder Raina of McMaster University, Dr. Christina Wolfson of McGill University and Dr. Susan Kirkland of Dalhousie University.

"Some people age in a healthy fashion despite many physical health challenges, while others who are in good physical health age less optimally," said Raina, the study's lead principal investigator. "What explains this phenomenon? The study will answer questions that are relevant to decision-makers to improve the health of Canadians."

Over the next year researchers and research coordinators, laboratory staff and IT systems personnel will begin working on the project at 10 centres across the country.

Study participants will be randomly selected from across Canada and, as such, Canadians will not be able to proactively volunteer to be part of the study. Once enrolled, participants will be studied at three-year intervals and will be followed for at least 20 years.

The study was announced May 21 by David Sweet, MP for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale, on behalf of Minister of Health Leona Aglukkaq.

"The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging will be one of the most comprehensive studies on aging ever undertaken," said Sweet. "It will inform the Government's programs and services for the elderly."

Further information on the study can be found on its website, www.clsa-elcv.ca.