

# Tomorrow's News

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*The Tomorrow Project*® - Albertans Studying the Connection Between Lifestyle and Cancer

## **The *Tomorrow Project* within Canada: Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project Launch**

Many of you may have seen news coverage in early June announcing the “Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project”. This large new project is being supported by a national organization called the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. It was officially launched in Montreal on June 11, 2008.

The success of Alberta's *Tomorrow Project* was one of the reasons that the decision was made to support the development of a national study. The fact that so many Albertans have been willing to join the *Tomorrow Project*, and have so generously completed questionnaires on an ongoing basis, helped to convince others across Canada that launching a nationwide study would be possible.

The national study will work as a federation of five cohort studies in different parts of the country. So far, the partners working together are: British Columbia (BC Cancer Agency), Alberta (Alberta Cancer Board), Ontario (Cancer Care Ontario with the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research), Atlantic Canada (led by Cancer Care Nova Scotia and Dalhousie University), and Quebec (the Cartagene Project). Some of those studies are already underway, like Alberta's *Tomorrow Project*, while others are just getting started. In the future, it is hoped that other provinces and territories may also become involved.

Following the same model as Alberta's *Tomorrow Project*, as many as 300,000 participants across the country will be asked to provide regular updates about their health and lifestyle over a long period of time. In addition, people will be invited to donate biological samples, like blood and urine. Tests on these kinds of samples can provide information about inherited factors and aspects of the environment that people live in that we cannot measure using questionnaires. Eventually, the layers of information that are built up over time will be analyzed to provide clues about why some people remain healthy and others do not.



Working together as a team of cancer researchers in this way means that a very large project can be built in a relatively short period of time. Ultimately, we will be able to start answering some questions about the causes of cancer more quickly than if we all worked on separate studies.

***For more information about the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer:***

<http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/>

***More about the Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project:***

<http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/inside.php?lang=EN&ID=127>

## ***How does the Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project affect participants enrolled in the Tomorrow Project in Alberta?***

The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, through its support of the national study, has provided funds to Alberta's *Tomorrow Project* that will help enhance the study's growth and development. This new funding complements existing support from the Alberta Cancer Board and the Alberta Cancer Foundation, which have generously funded the *Tomorrow Project* since it began in 2000.

The additional funding from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer means that we can invite you to donate biological samples, have some measurements taken, and provide some updated information about your health. Biological samples and physical measurements are extremely valuable because they can tell us a lot about general health.

## ***When will the new phase of the Project start?***

Depending on where you live in Alberta, you will be invited to take part in this new part of the study between Fall 2008 and Spring 2012. We are hoping to set up temporary study centres for short periods of time at different locations around the entire province. This should make participation in this phase of the study as convenient as possible. We cannot tell you yet where the centres will be because we are still working on the protocols. However, we anticipate that the majority of people will not need to travel for long distances if they want to take part in this phase of the study.

When we are setting up a centre in a location that is close to where you live, we will send you an invitation to participate. The invitation will include more detailed information about the study, as well as a new consent form and a short questionnaire. If you choose to take part, we will set up an appointment for you at the study centre. At the centre, you will be invited to provide some biological samples (like blood and urine), have some measurements taken (like bone quality, blood pressure, height and weight), and complete a questionnaire.

## ***Will you be sharing my information with other researchers?***

Only if you give us permission to do so. We will be asking every *Tomorrow Project* participant if they are willing to take part in this new phase of the project. In addition, we will be asking if participants wish to contribute their existing and new information to a database being developed as part of the national "Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project".

To help you decide whether or not you want to participate in this new phase of the study, we are developing an information brochure and new consent form. These documents will help explain how the existing work of the Alberta *Tomorrow Project* fits with the plans for the national study. Invitations and study information will be sent out between Fall 2008 and Spring 2012. As always, participation in any part of the *Tomorrow Project* is completely voluntary.

We are working closely with the Alberta Cancer Board's Information Security and Privacy Office to ensure that we comply with the appropriate privacy laws and best practice guidelines. We would like to reassure you that we will never contribute any of your information or samples to the national study unless you give us specific written consent to do so. Even then, any information that is shared with the national study will not contain anything that could be used to identify you.

We will keep you informed of the progress of this phase of this study in future newsletters!

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## **Two New Initiatives Building on the Tomorrow Project!**

Over the next several months, some of you may be invited to participate in studies that are related to the *Tomorrow Project*, but are not a core part of the *Tomorrow Project*. Please keep in mind that you always have the option to choose not to participate in these additional studies without affecting your participation in the *Tomorrow Project*.

### **Measuring Activity Related Energy Expenditure Study**

Drs Paula Robson (Principal investigator, *Tomorrow Project*) and Ilona Csizmadi (Co-investigator, *Tomorrow Project*) are currently developing a new questionnaire that will ask about **all** kinds of activities, not just vigorous or moderate exercise, that people do on a typical day. With this information we can estimate the amount of energy that people use or 'expend' on a daily basis. Some studies have suggested that the total amount of energy expended during a day, not just the time doing exercise, might impact future health. Unfortunately, there are no good ways of assessing total energy expenditure in large groups of people. Therefore, we're working on developing a new tool called the *Sedentary Time and Activity Reporting Questionnaire*.



We are looking for potential volunteers to help with developing the questionnaire. Because we will need to take some measurements in our laboratory, we are seeking volunteers who live in Calgary or surrounding area. People who are eligible would be invited to our centre on three occasions, two weeks apart. On the first visit, some measurements and paperwork would be completed. On several occasions over the following two weeks, you would be asked to keep a diary of your day to day activities. In addition, we would ask you to donate some small samples of urine, blood and saliva on three days over that same two week period.

If you think that you might be interested in hearing more about this study, please call our toll free line (1-877-919-9292). We will add your name to a list and get back to you with more detailed information when we start recruiting volunteers. If you express interest at this point, you are not committing yourself to take part in the study.

### **Individual, Social, and Environmental Determinants of Physical Activity in Alberta**

Dr Heather Bryant (former Principal Investigator, *Tomorrow Project*) is heading a study of factors that influence the amount of physical activity that people do. It is known that physical activity can help reduce the risk of developing some cancers. However, the environment in which people live can affect how much activity they are able to do on a daily basis. The researchers are hoping to learn more about the types of personal, social and environmental factors that influence activity levels. This kind of knowledge can be used by policy makers, planners and health professionals to address some of the aspects of modern life that hinder people from participating in recommended levels of activity.

Participation in this study involves completing a 16 page questionnaire. The questionnaire is being mailed to about one third of Tomorrow Project participants. The questionnaire is in the same envelope as Survey 2008. The package also includes an invitation letter and some more information about Dr Bryant's study. If you decide to complete the questionnaire, you can send it back in the same envelope as your completed Survey 2008.

## Study Update

Our second follow up survey, Survey 2008, is underway throughout Alberta. The first follow up survey took place in 2004, so Survey 2008 will be the first follow up for many of you. The first batch of questionnaires was sent out to 4500 people in May 2008. Batches of surveys will continue to be sent out on a monthly basis, with the last one scheduled for October 2008.

In addition to asking for updated health and lifestyle information, we have included questions about the built environment where you live, the kinds of jobs that you have worked in, and a history of where you have lived over your lifetime. Thanks to everyone who has completed and sent back Survey 2008 so far. As always, we appreciate the time and effort that you devote to the study!

## Do you think the Built Environment section of Survey 2008 doesn't apply to you?

You may be right! For those of you who have already received Survey 2008, you may have been frustrated with the questions about the neighbourhood surrounding your home, especially if you live in the country. We are trying to understand how the characteristics of the areas where people live affect the amount and type of physical activity they are able to do. Unfortunately, most of the research in this area has focused on people living in towns and cities. We think that we should be able to do better. One of the things we will try to do is use your answers and comments to figure out some questions that are more meaningful for people who live in rural and remote areas. We are very grateful for all your feedback, because it helps us develop better ways of exploring aspects of daily life and environment that may be related to future health.

## Was the residential history section on Survey 2008 tedious?

We want to send out a big thank you to all of you who have taken the time to do such a good job listing all of the places that you have lived over your lifetime. This is important information for us to have. However, when we designed the survey we were not sure how much of that information participants would be able to remember. So far we have been very impressed with the surveys that have been returned and the amount of detail that many of you have included!

## What's next?

Right from the beginning, the aim of the *Tomorrow Project* was to have 50,000 participants enrolled in Alberta. We reached approximately 30,000 by the end of 2007, and recruitment has been on hold while we sent out Survey 2008. In the autumn, as the mail outs of the follow up surveys wind down, phones in Alberta will start ringing again to recruit more participants. We are hoping to have reached our target of 50,000 participants by March 2011.

## Please help us keep our files up to date

Because the *Tomorrow Project* is a long-term study, staying in touch with participants is an important part of our work. It reduces the number of participants who are "lost-to-follow-up". Please take a moment to contact us with any changes or additions to your contact information. Remember, we can send you information wherever you live, even outside Alberta or Canada.

## Need to contact us?

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