



ALBERTA'S  
TOMORROW  
PROJECT

Inspiring research for  
a healthier tomorrow

UPDATE ON ALBERTA'S TOMORROW PROJECT

# Tomorrow's News

ESTABLISHED IN 2000 TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
CANCER AND CHRONIC DISEASE

VISIT: [www.myATP.ca](http://www.myATP.ca)

VOLUME EIGHT - ISSUE ONE - WINTER 2018

## It's not too late to fill out Survey 2017!



*The follow-up survey is mobile friendly.*

Thank you to all of our participants who have already completed their follow up survey. To those of you who have yet to finish, it's not too late!

Long-term studies like Alberta's Tomorrow Project (ATP) depend on their participants to fill out ongoing questionnaires. Thanks to your updated information now and in years to come, researchers can learn which lifestyle, environmental and genetic factors make some people susceptible to cancer and chronic diseases over time, while others stay healthy and resilient.

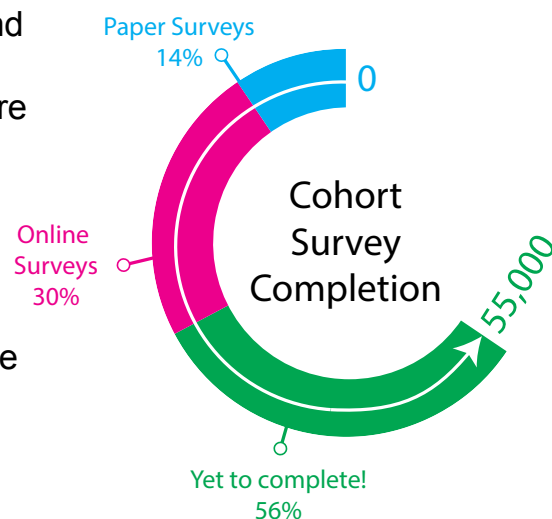
In 2017 we launched a full online survey to our entire cohort for the first time. The registration process can be challenging and we very much appreciate your patience! Once you get to the survey itself, you will find it smoother and faster than completing on paper. We are here to help if you run into any problems, and we are working hard to continue improving your online experience. Our contact information is on the last page.

We remain committed to offering the option of completing this survey – and those in the future - online.

Going digital means your responses are captured as accurately as possible, while printing, mailing, and manual review costs are avoided. Strong fiscal management will ensure the long-term sustainability of this valuable project.

Paper versions still remain an option. Rest assured that your privacy and confidentiality remain a top priority at Alberta's Tomorrow Project.

We encourage you to finish your Survey 2017, whether online or on paper, before **June 15, 2018.**



ATP Survey status as of March 1, 2018



# ATP Announces New Scientific Director

This year saw another significant step in the evolution of Alberta's Tomorrow Project (ATP), with the transition of scientific leadership from Dr. Paula Robson to Dr. Jennifer Vena.

Dr. Robson led ATP's scientific development and growth of the cohort from 2006-2017 and she now advances to a senior position as Scientific Director of Cancer Research within the division of Cancer Control Alberta at Alberta Health Services.

In her new role Dr. Robson will build on her considerable legacy, continuing to help improve cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment practices in Alberta and beyond. ATP would like to thank Dr. Robson for her innovative leadership, her



*Dr. Jennifer Vena, Scientific Director*

energy for new collaborations and new ideas, and her commitment to the goals of ATP and its participants to drive meaningful health research.

"It is with mixed feelings that I leave ATP," says Dr. Robson.

"However, I am confident that Dr. Vena will bring a new energy that will ensure that ATP fulfills its mission of advancing knowledge in

cancer and chronic disease etiology and prevention."

ATP welcomes Dr. Vena in her new role as Scientific Director and Principal Investigator. Since joining ATP in 2015, Dr. Vena has held senior research roles overseeing publications and fostering new collaborations with national and international scientists.

"I am honored to build on the strong foundation built by Dr. Robson and the ATP team," says Dr. Vena.

"Every day we are working towards making ATP a world-class longitudinal study, thanks to the continued support and dedication of our participants, staff and funders. I am truly excited for what lies ahead!"



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Alberta's Tomorrow Project's research platform is very valuable to my research on whether eating fruits, vegetables and whole grains can reduce the cancer risk from red and processed meat.

More red meat is eaten in Alberta than in any other province, so the detailed information ATP participants give about their diet over time will help us learn which other foods might help lower that risk of cancer.

**DR. KATERINA MAXIMOVA - ASSISTANT PROFESSOR**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH - UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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# Who's Getting Screened for Colorectal Cancer?

More than 90% of colorectal cancer (CRC) cases happen in people over the age of 50.

Regular screening is an important way to catch the disease in its earliest stages, and improve survival.

What's not well understood is how closely adults follow recommendations for consistent, regular CRC screening.

To find out, a team of Alberta's Tomorrow Project (ATP) researchers tracked whether participants had been screened for CRC when they enrolled in the study, and after at least four years of follow-up.

The good news?

Most of those at highest risk (people who have a history of bowel disease and also a family history of CRC) had undergone some method of screening.

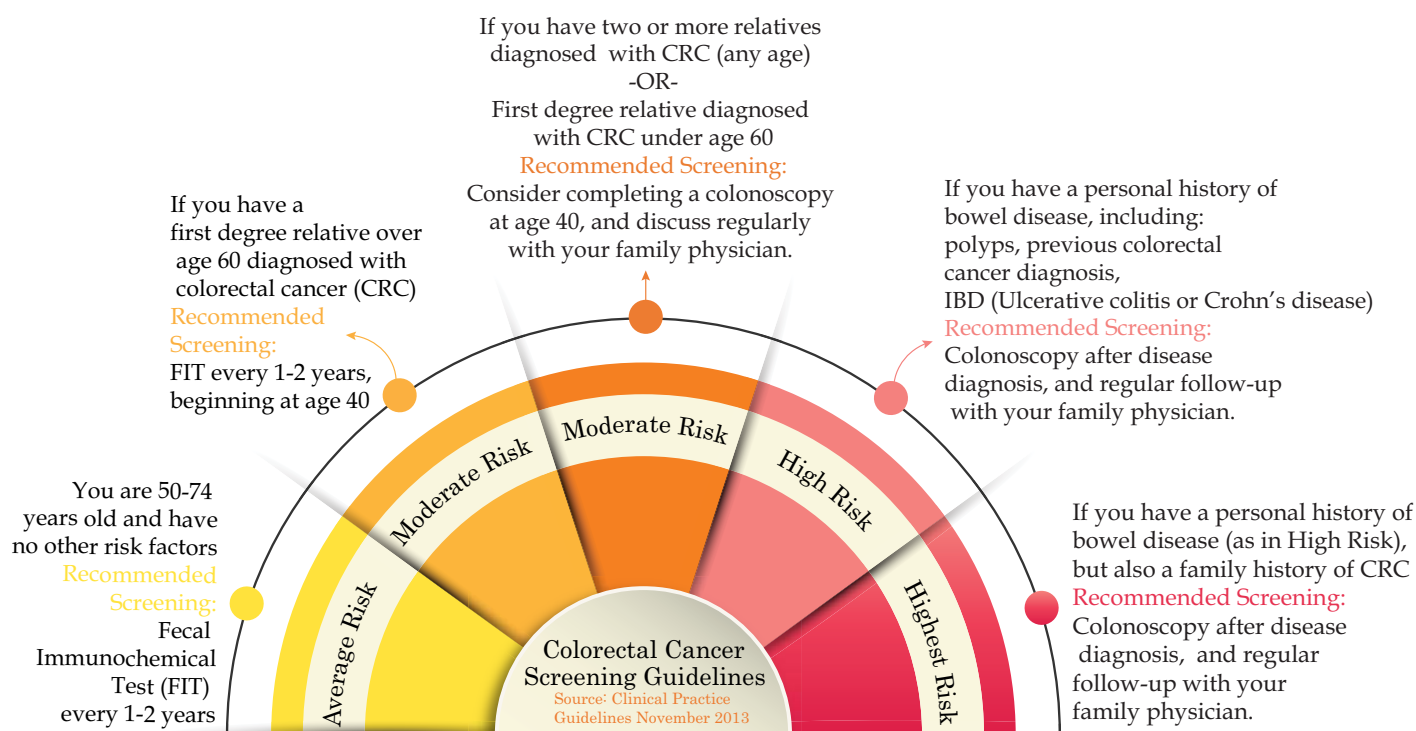
However, the majority of older (meaning, over age 50) adults are at average-risk, and for this group screening was far less consistent.

Lead author Nathan Solbak, MSc., says that we need to understand what's preventing average-risk adults from being screened to inform future health promotion campaigns. Simple tests like the Fecal Immunochemical

Test (FIT) used to detect blood in the stool are neither expensive nor invasive.

"While we discovered that some people over 50 were getting screened on a regular basis, many were not," he observes. "Following screening recommendations, in addition to healthy lifestyle choices such as diet and physical activity, can make a huge difference to lowering the risk of CRC, the third most common cancer."

The study is published online in *BMC Public Health*, and a link to the full paper is available on our website at [www.myATP.ca](http://www.myATP.ca).



According to the 2013 Clinical Practice Guidelines, screening has the potential to reduce colorectal cancer deaths by up to 50%.

# Skip the Gym & Join a Walkable Neighbourhood



*Dr. Gavin McCormack,  
University of Calgary*

Can the layout of your neighbourhood help keep you active? Dr. Gavin McCormack believes it can.

An associate professor at the University of Calgary's Cumming School of Medicine, McCormack is examining information from more than 10,000 ATP participants to research the effect of community design on physical activity.

He studies how different aspects of where we live – like whether we must cross a busy thoroughfare to get to our destination, if sidewalks and pathways are safe,

convenient and accessible, and the number of shops and bakeries nearby – affect our willingness to walk instead of drive.

“We definitely know from other Canadian and international research that the way neighbourhoods are designed and built has an effect on activities like walking and cycling,” McCormack notes.

“But we don't know whether the local environment causes us to walk more, to get us where we need to go, or simply for recreation.”

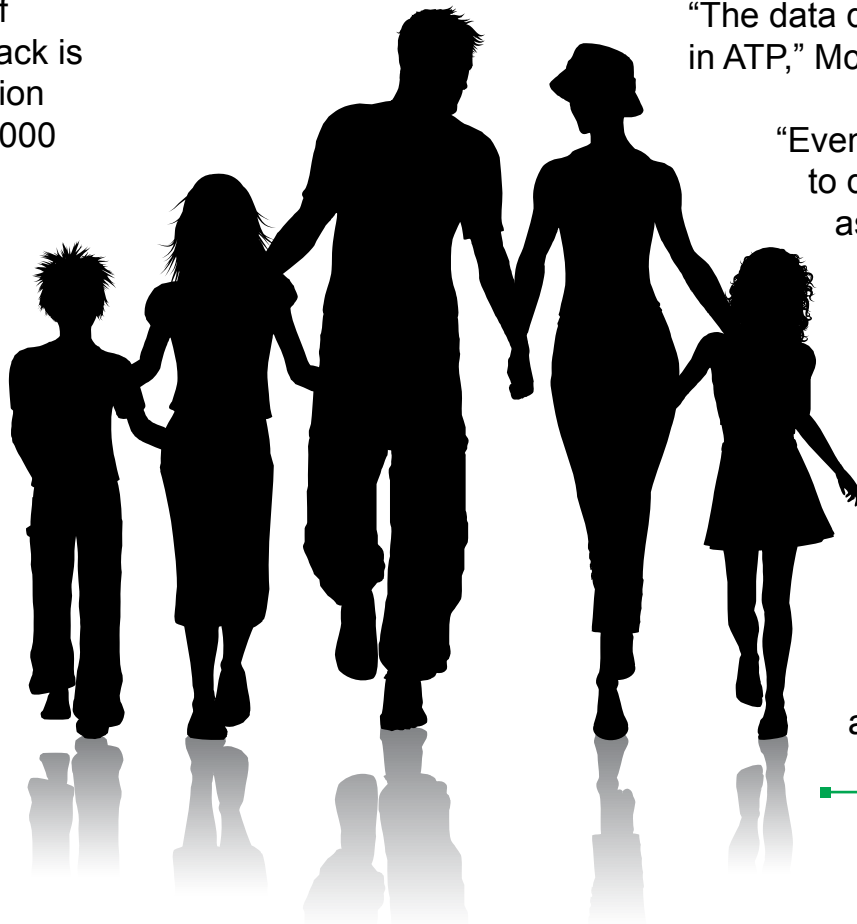
It's a chicken-and-egg mystery: do people choose a neighbourhood because they like to walk, or did moving to that neighbourhood prompt them to walk more?

Thanks to data collected over time from ATP participants, McCormack can track those who relocated to areas that were scored as more, or less, walking-friendly.

By comparing participants' physical activity levels at different stages, he can draw conclusions about whether the design of each community played a role.

“The data quality is very high in ATP,” McCormack says.

“Eventually we hope to discover which aspects of a neighbourhood encourage the most walking, so urban planners and transportation experts can design communities that naturally promote physical activity.”





# Healthy Lifestyle Now, Cope Better with Cancer Later?

A growing body of evidence is showing that a healthy lifestyle can help prevent a first diagnosis of cancer.

Research – including studies by Alberta’s Tomorrow Project (ATP) investigators – links better nutrition, more physical activity, avoiding smoking and limiting alcohol with a lower risk of many forms of the disease.

Unfortunately, some people who follow prevention guidelines from international agencies like the World Cancer Research Fund are still among the almost one in two Canadians to get an alarming diagnosis of cancer in their lifetime.

Now, researchers like Dr. Winson Cheung at Alberta Health Services (AHS) want to learn what difference certain lifestyle habits make for surviving treatment, and avoiding a second cancer diagnosis in the future.

“It’s very hard to understand why some people who do all the right things get cancer,” says Cheung. “When I speak to patients about the disease, they often feel their efforts were wasted. But we believe their healthy habits will still make a difference to what happens next.”

As the Provincial Director of Cancer Health Services Research, Cheung examines so-called “real-world outcomes”: why a disease occurs, what unfolds beyond a diagnosis, and what may lead to its return.

He’s referencing details from ATP participants about their long-term diet, physical activity and other lifestyle habits with Alberta Cancer Registry data, along with health records of treatment, medication and follow-up after a first cancer diagnosis.

About 3,300 of ATP’s 55,000 participants have been



*Dr. Winson Cheung,  
Alberta Health Services*

diagnosed with cancer since the project was launched in 2000.

“This is complex and time-consuming research, and ATP is one of the few platforms that’s large enough to show if longstanding lifestyle patterns affect the eventual health outcome. We can’t prevent all cancers, but it would be nice to be able to tell patients one day if they’re still better off through treatment and beyond because of earlier healthy habits.”



“ Alberta’s Tomorrow Project was built to go forward and investigate patterns. Anything I can do to help solve the mystery of cancer is a good thing. ”

*ALBERTA’S TOMORROW PROJECT PARTICIPANT*

# Navigating Streams of Environmental Data



*Dr. Jeff Brook, University of Toronto*

Like Canada's early explorers, a group of researchers are mapping a national network to more nimbly navigate rivers and oceans – of health and environmental data.

Aptly named CANUE, the Canadian Urban Environmental Health

Research Consortium was created in 2016 to connect scientific streams studying everything from local air quality and vehicle traffic, to noise and light pollution in urban areas.

Principal investigator and long-time environmental scientist Dr. Jeff Brook was determined to help experts in these diverse disciplines work more closely together, to explore existing rich research platforms like Alberta's Tomorrow Project (ATP).

"ATP participants have offered so many details about where they've lived and their habits over time," says Brook, an assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

"Scientists working in these areas have a unique opportunity to collaborate and learn how being exposed to air pollution, having access to green spaces like parks, or experiencing traumatic events like a forest fire or flood affects people's health in the years that follow.

"The more we understand, the more we can do to adapt and prepare, to minimize the negative health effects of problems like these in the future."

ATP joins the CANUE consortium along with four other regional cohorts within the Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project.



## Can Laws Help Lower Secondhand Smoke?

Legislation aimed at limiting where people can smoke, and how cigarettes are advertised, usually targets the smokers themselves. But what about non-smokers, and how much unhealthy smoke they routinely face?

Alberta's Tomorrow Project (ATP) researchers wanted to learn whether people were exposed to less secondhand smoke after a new provincial law was introduced in 2008. Alberta's Tobacco Reduction Act prohibited smoking in all

public areas and workplaces, limited how smoking could be promoted and where tobacco products were sold. Surveys filled out by ATP participants in the years before 2008 and after, let investigators track changes in exposure to other people's smoke.

Lead author Tiffany Haig notes, "Participant surveys offer us a great opportunity to see how things change over time, since we ask the same information – of the same people – at regular intervals."

Indeed, Haig's study found that in the years after 2008, the amount of smoke non-smokers faced dropped significantly: 60% reduction in workplaces, and 50% less exposure at home.

While she and her colleagues can't conclusively state that the new law caused the decline, the findings suggest that the act has had a positive impact on the families, friends and coworkers of smokers.



# ATP Data Helps Shape Cancer Prevention Advice

Many Alberta's Tomorrow Project (ATP) participants joined the study in hopes of benefiting future generations, but their survey information is already contributing to provincial health messages today.

The website, **Alberta Prevents Cancer** ([www.albertapreventscancer.ca](http://www.albertapreventscancer.ca)) promotes a handful of so-called "modifiable" habits which can prevent up to 45 per cent - almost half - of cancers. These are behaviours we can change, such as consuming less alcohol, being more

physically active, eating a nutritious diet, and avoiding tobacco.



Alberta Prevents Cancer Logo  
[www.albertapreventscancer.ca](http://www.albertapreventscancer.ca)

Led by Alberta epidemiologists Dr. Christine Friedenreich and Dr. Darren Brenner, the groundbreaking research was based in part on ATP participant data and is now being expanded across the country.

As Scientific Leader of the Department of Cancer Epidemiology and Prevention Research of Alberta Health Services, Dr. Friedenreich says that shaping health promotion campaigns based on real evidence is just the start of ATP's potential impact.

"Because participants will be followed for many years, we'll also be able to estimate which public health messages targeting things like healthier diet, more physical activity, or quitting smoking will do the most good. It's exciting!"



## Who's Who in Alberta's Tomorrow Project

The year 2010 was a very tough one for Wayne Matthews' family.

The Alberta's Tomorrow Project (ATP) participant lost three family members that year to cancer.

A retired electrician in Fort McMurray, Matthews describes the extreme toll cancer has taken on those closest to him.

"My son Nathan passed away during treatment for testicular cancer at the age of 29, in February 2010.



Wayne Matthews (R) and his son Caleb at the Ride to Conquer Cancer.

My wife Kathy passed away five months later from multiple myeloma. And that September, my father-in-law Howard died of cancer. I'm sick of losing family and friends to this terrible disease."

As a way to "carry on the good fight", Matthews joined ATP in 2012 after hearing about the project's goal to discover why some people get cancer and others don't.

"It was a reaction to what we've been through, and a desire to let others avoid the same heartache," he recalls.

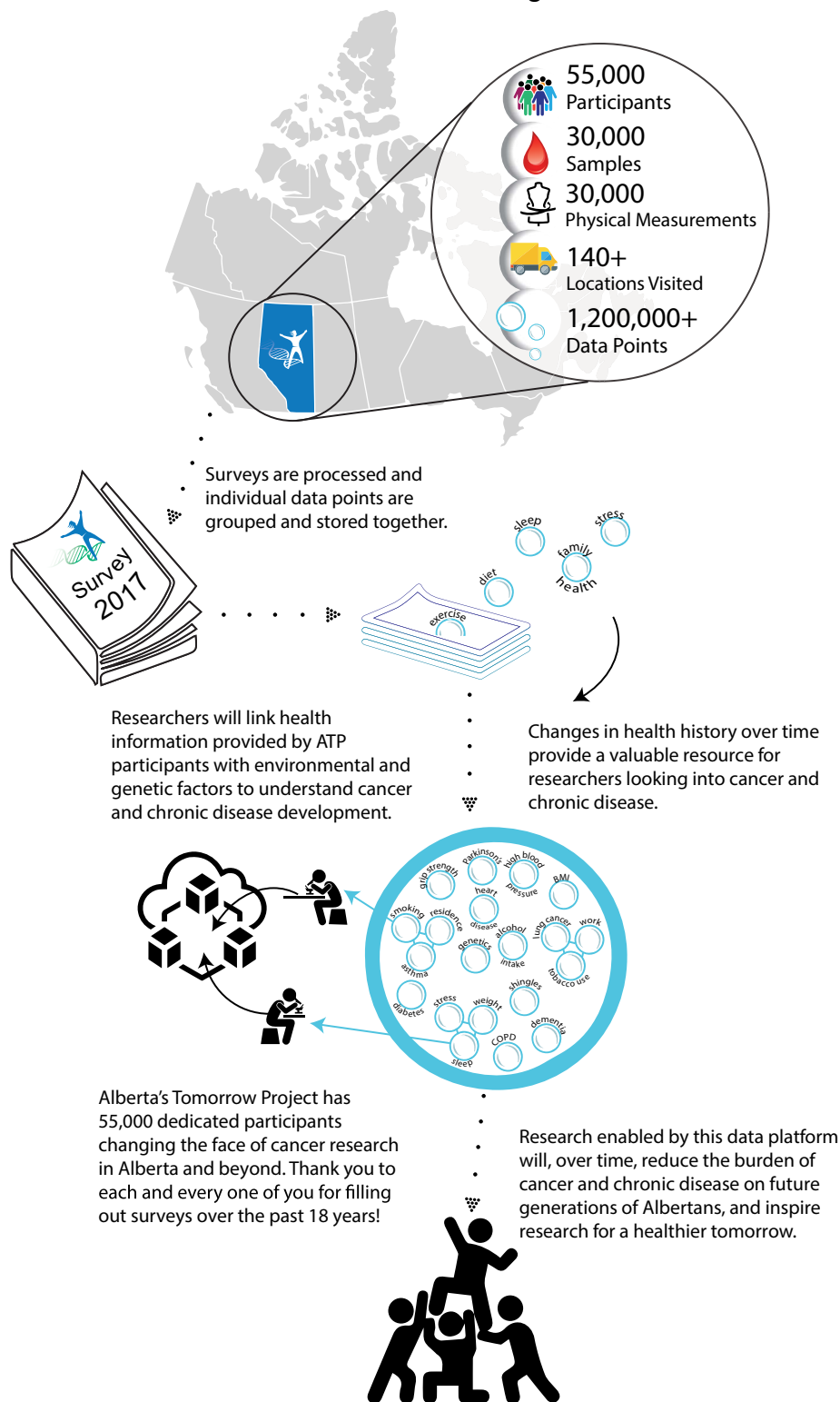
"There are still so many questions about how to stay cancer-free, what to eat, and what to do. If ATP can help us learn how to avoid cancer, maybe even help find a cure, I'd be really happy with that."





# How ATP Data is Used

*A brief visualization of ATP's long term mission*



In Partnership With:



## Please Help Us Keep Your Files Up To Date

Have you moved, retired, changed your email address or phone number? Take a moment to update us with your new contact information.

Staying in touch with participants is important for the project's success!

Keeping current participant contact information reduces the number of participants who are 'lost to follow-up.'

Please take a moment to notify us with any changes or additions to your information. Even if you move outside of Alberta or Canada, you can still remain a participant!

## Contact Us

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