

NEWS RELEASE

For release: Wednesday, June 17, 2009 at 1:30 P.M. Pacific Time

BC researchers receive national funding for targeting youth obesity *Project to examine factors influencing behaviour change*

(Vancouver – June 17, 2009) – Investigators at the Child & Family Research Institute (CFRI) at BC Children’s Hospital have been awarded \$449,857 over three years to study how home and school environments influence the attempts of overweight adolescents to lose weight, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) announced today. The funding is awarded in partnership from CIHR, the Rx&D Health Research Foundation, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, and the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada.

The project will involve 150 adolescents (11–16 years old) who are overweight. Along with one of their parents, the youth will participate in a six-month web-based program called “My Steps” that’s aimed at helping the youth change specific behaviours: increasing physical activity, reducing screen time, and improving nutrition. Recruitment for the study is expected to begin at the end of the summer.

“The program helps them set goals and strategies to keep them motivated for behaviour change and to support them when they are having issues,” says Dr. Louise Mâsse, the principal investigator. Dr. Mâsse is a Scientist at the Child & Family Research Institute, Michael Smith of Health Research Senior Scholar, and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of British Columbia. “The internet is a medium that adolescents enjoy and the program only requires approximately 20-30 minutes of online time each week.”

Youth participating in the research project will have bi-weekly telephone or email counselling to support them in addressing specific challenges. They’ll also receive a pedometer to help them track their daily steps.

“The research focus is on understanding motivation, which the literature shows starts to decline at three months,” says Dr. Mâsse. “We also aim to find out what we can do to improve the efficacy of the program, based on feedback from the adolescents about what they like and dislike.”

The web program was developed and evaluated in the United States and it is being modified to reflect Canadian nutrition and physical activity guidelines.

“Controlling obesity and the diseases related to it requires research into wellness strategies that allow individual Canadians – starting especially with our children – to better maintain their personal health through healthy lifestyles,” said Dr. Alain Beaudet,

President of CIHR. “Partnerships with stakeholders play a key role in this regard, and I am very pleased to join with Rx&D Health Research Foundation, The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, and Health Canada to fund these projects.”

“More and more of our children are sedentary, have too much screen time, and are eating unhealthy foods,” says Sally Brown, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. “This imminent health crisis is preventable. We need to find solutions to address childhood obesity and help our kids before they become the first generation to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.”

“Our Foundation has made reducing and preventing childhood obesity a core priority and we know that working as partners, we can accomplish much more,” says Dr. Yves Morin, Chair of the Rx&D Health Research Foundation. “We are tremendously excited about this initiative working in collaboration with our partners toward our common goal which is healthier, happier children.”

“Prevention is crucial to better health especially as it applies to our children,” said Russell Williams, President of Canada’s Research Based Pharmaceutical Companies (Rx&D). “I believe partnerships like this one are crucial to find innovative ways to combat this growing problem which is affecting the health of our children.”

Co-investigators on Dr. Mâsse’s project include:

- Dr. Susan Barr, Professor, Food Nutrition and Health, UBC
- Dr. Rollin Brant, Research Scientist, CFRI; Professor, Statistics, UBC
- Dr. Jean-Pierre Chanoine, Senior Associate Clinician Scientist, CFRI; Head, Endocrinology and Diabetes Unit, BC Children’s Hospital (an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority); Clinical Professor, Pediatrics, UBC
- Dr. Josie Geller, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, UBC; Research Director, Eating Disorders Clinic, Providence Health Care
- Dr. Dina Panagiotopoulos, Associate Clinician Scientist, CFRI; Pediatric Endocrinologist, BC Children’s Hospital; Assistant Professor, Pediatrics, UBC

Consultants on this project include:

- Dr. Sheri Thompson, Vice President Business Development, Santech Inc, La Jolla, CA.
- Dr. Kevin Patrick, Professor of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of California, San Diego and the California Institute of Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2); Senior Scientist, Santech Inc, La Jolla, CA.

CFRI conducts discovery, clinical and applied research to benefit the health of children and families. It is the largest institute of its kind in Western Canada. CFRI works in close partnership with the University of British Columbia, BC Children’s Hospital and Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, BC Women’s Hospital & Health Centre, agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority, and BC Children’s Hospital Foundation. CFRI has additional important relationships with BC’s five regional health authorities and with BC

academic institutions Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, the University of Northern British Columbia, and the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

The UBC Faculty of Medicine provides innovative programs in the health and life sciences, teaching students at the undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels, and generates more than \$200 million in research funding each year. In 2007/08, out of the total UBC research endeavour, 53 per cent, or \$247 million, came from academic and clinical teams in the Faculty of Medicine.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is the Government of Canada's agency for health research. CIHR's mission is to create new scientific knowledge and to catalyze its translation into improved health, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened Canadian health-care system. Composed of 13 Institutes, CIHR provides leadership and support to more than 13,000 health researchers and trainees across Canada. www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca

The Heart and Stroke Foundation, a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy. www.heartandstroke.ca

The Rx&D Health Research Foundation is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support health research in Canadian academic health centres and to promote the value of health research in Canada. Founded in 1964 by Canada's Research-Based Pharmaceutical Companies (Rx&D), the HRF applies the highest standards of scientific excellence to address health challenges of great importance to Canadian society. It accomplishes this through a longstanding tradition of establishing partnerships with the academic field and government. As one of the leading private health research foundations in the country, the HRF contributes significantly to the prevention and treatment of disease and to a better health care system. www.canadapharma.org/HRF

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Dr. Louise Mâsse is available only for telephone interviews:

Wednesday, June 17th, 2009 between 1:30 – 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time

Thursday, June 18th, 2009 between 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time

Images:

Screen shots of the web-based program are available upon request.

For more information, please contact:

Jennifer Kohm, Child & Family Research Institute

tel: (604) 875-2401 jkohm@cw.bc.ca

Stephanie Dunn, Child & Family Research Institute

tel: (604) 875-3885 sdunn@cw.bc.ca