



## **HIGH QUALITY HEALTH RESEARCH SUPPORTED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DISEASE**

Twenty-six new research projects aimed at preventing cancer, diabetes and heart disease are announced by the National Prevention Research Initiative (NPRI).

The NPRI, established in October 2004, has targeted these conditions because of their significant impact on public health – affecting or killing thousands of people every year in the UK and millions worldwide.

The newly funded studies have direct relevance on influencing health behaviours to prevent or minimise smoking and alcohol use, and to encourage physical activity and a good diet.

The projects are based in a number of settings such as schools, neighbourhoods, homes, the work place and GP surgeries. They explore a range of approaches to encourage positive health behaviour, from the use of personal mentors through the health services to the internet. The following are examples of the projects which will be funded:

- Developing strategies to tackle the early origins of obesity;
- Helping Bangladeshi and Pakistani men to stop smoking;
- Mapping physical activity and health in the urban environment;
- Using the internet to encourage weight loss for overweight African-Caribbean women;
- Profiles of physical activity in older adults;
- Assessing the effect of alcohol marketing on drinking by young people;
- Exploring the timing of meals and physical activity to promote good health in shift workers;
- Influencing food purchasing by low income consumers.

The NPRI was founded by the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI). It brings together a broad range of funders drawn from the public and charity sectors: British Heart Foundation; Cancer Research UK; Department of Health; Diabetes UK; Economic and Social Research Council; Food Standards Agency; Medical Research Council; Research and Development Office for the Northern Ireland Health and Social Services; Chief Scientist Office, Scottish Executive Health Department; Welsh Assembly Government and World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK). The NPRI welcomes approaches from other organisations wishing to join the consortium, to contribute to the success of this important initiative.

The Health Minister, Jane Kennedy said: “Good quality research on how best to change people’s behaviour is vital if we are to improve public health and prevent illness and death from cancer, heart disease and diabetes.”

“The National Prevention Research Initiative provides a truly co-ordinated approach to prevention research. By bringing together the expertise of UK researchers, charities and government, we can develop and implement the most effective ways of changing health-related behaviour.”

Dr Diana Dunstan, who chairs the board of NPRI Funding Partners says: “This unique initiative is funding research which crosses traditional boundaries between disease groups. The multidisciplinary

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01/12/2005

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research teams will be combining expertise to focus on common prevention issues to maximise benefit to the UK public”.

Professor Alex Markham, Chairman of the NCRI and Chief Executive of Cancer Research UK, says: “Tobacco use, obesity, low physical activity and excessive alcohol intake are at the root of many diseases. There will never be a pill that people can take that will wipe out these factors – so we must imaginatively approach them in the local community and find ways of minimising these deadly risks.”

“People deserve accurate information about the risks that exist in some everyday lifestyles. We find it difficult to equate being a ‘couch potato’ with a heightened risk of heart disease. Or on that night out, that the pack of cigarettes is another step on a path to lung cancer. Put simply, a better lifestyle means a better chance of a longer disease-free life.”

Ray Fitzpatrick, chair of the NPRI Scientific Committee and Professor of Public Health at the University of Oxford commented: “This initiative is a unique collaboration between government departments, research councils and major charities to provide the UK with the evidence base that is needed to make further breakthroughs in preventing ill-health.”

“Prevention is definitely not top-down ‘nagging’ by the government or the medical profession. It is society itself learning imaginative ways to support healthier life styles, whether by making better use of the internet, community partnerships with local shops, training members of the community to be health advisors or using modern marketing skills to promote healthier living. We all urgently need to know what works.”

Further details can be found at <http://www.mrc.ac.uk/index/funding-npri> or <http://www.npri.org.uk>



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## NOTES FOR EDITORS

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a partnership between government, the voluntary sector and the private sector, with the primary mission of maximising patient benefit that accrues from cancer research in the UK through coordination of effort and joint planning towards an integrated national strategy for cancer research. [www.ncri.org.uk](http://www.ncri.org.uk)

The NCRI consists of: The Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); The Association for International Cancer Research; The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research Fund; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Relief; Marie Curie Cancer Care; The Medical Research Council; The National Assembly for Wales; Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services Research & Development Office; Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Executive Health Department; Tenovus; Wellcome Trust and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) is leading the battle against heart and circulatory disease - the UK's biggest killer. The Charity is a major funder and authority in cardiovascular research. It plays an important role in funding education, both of the public and of health professionals, and in providing life-saving cardiac equipment and support for rehabilitation and patient care. For more information on the BHF, visit [bhf.org.uk](http://bhf.org.uk).

Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to research on the causes, treatment and prevention of cancer. We are one of the few independent organisations with the ability to take pioneering research all the way from the laboratory bench to the patient's bedside. We fund over 3400 scientists, doctors and nurses based throughout the UK. Professor Alex Markham, quoted above is the Chief Executive of Cancer Research UK. For more information please go to [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

The Department of Health invests over £650 million each year in research on health services, public health and social care. This funding supports clinical research in the NHS, research commissioned for policy development, and the NHS costs incurred in supporting research funded by other bodies such as the Research Councils and charities. Funding is also provided to increase capacity in the NHS to undertake research and to underpin the UK Clinical Research Collaboration and priority disease research networks.

Diabetes UK is the charity for people with diabetes. We fund medical research, provide information and support to people with diabetes and campaign on their behalf. Established in 1934, Diabetes UK's mission is 'to improve the lives of people with diabetes and to work towards a future without the condition'. The largest patient body in Europe, Diabetes UK has over 180,000 members and a network of offices across the UK. For more information about Diabetes UK go to [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk) or phone us on 020 7424 1000.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest funding agency for research and postgraduate training relating to social and economic issues. It provides independent, high quality, relevant research to business, the public sector and Government. The ESRC invests more than £123 million every year in social science and at any time is supporting some 2,000 researchers in academic institutions and research policy institutes. It also funds postgraduate training within the social sciences to nurture the researchers of tomorrow. More at <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk>

The Food Standards Agency is an independent food safety watchdog set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food. The Agency's key aims are to:

- reduce foodborne illness by 20% by improving food safety right through the food chain
- help people to eat more healthily
- promote honest and informative labelling to help consumers
- promote best practice within the food industry
- improve the enforcement of food law
- earn people's trust by what we do and how we do it

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is a national organisation funded by the UK tax-payer. Its business is medical research aimed at improving human health; everyone stands to benefit from the outputs. The research it supports and the scientists it trains meet the needs of the health services, the pharmaceutical and other health-related industries and the academic world. MRC has funded work which has led to some of the most significant discoveries and achievements in medicine in the UK. About half of the MRC's expenditure of approximately £500 million is invested in its 40 Institutes, Units and Centres. The remaining half goes in the form of grant support and training awards to individuals and teams in universities and medical schools. Web site at: <http://www.mrc.ac.uk>.

The Research & Development Office of the Northern Ireland Health & Social Services promotes health and wellbeing by encouraging, supporting and investing in high quality research and development. The R&D Office supports research in all the health & social care professions in Northern Ireland and participates in UK-wide schemes such as NPRI. It supports a substantial programme of research in prevention, health promotion and targeting social need.

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The Chief Scientist Office (part of the Scottish Executive Health Department) supports and promotes high quality research aimed at securing lasting improvements to the health of the people in Scotland, and improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of health services and healthcare in Scotland. CSO commissions work in specific priority areas, supports research initiated by the research community in Scotland, and advises the Scottish Executive Health Department on how research contributes to improvements in health and healthcare. CSO invests approximately £49 million per year in health research.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving the health and wealth of the people of Wales, particularly through prevention and early intervention of disease and disability. This initiative will enable Wales to develop an evidence-based approach to meet these objectives. The Wales Office of Research and Development for Health and Social Care is leading Wales's contribution to this initiative on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government.

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK) is the principal UK charity dedicated to the prevention of cancer through the promotion of healthy diet and nutrition, physical activity and weight management. Its mission is to reduce the number of people being diagnosed with cancer each year – both in the UK and worldwide. WCRF UK has over 350,000 supporters across the UK helping the charity to fund research and provide a wide range of education materials. Its first report *Food, Nutrition and the Prevention of Cancer: a global perspective* (1997) represented a milestone in the rapidly emerging field of cancer prevention. As a testimony to its success, well over 30,000 copies have been produced, distributed and sold worldwide. A second report, due to be published in 2007, will act as the most authoritative global report ever published on the subject of food, nutrition, physical activity and the prevention of cancer. It will form the basis for the development of a global strategy for cancer prevention and control and will set the agenda for science in the years to come. Website at: <http://www.wcrf-uk.org>.