



November 16th, 2005

MEDIA STATEMENT

JOONDALUP COMMUNITY INVITED INTO NEW FAMILY HEALTH STUDY

Members of the Joondalup community are to be invited to consider participating in a new Family Health Study being proposed by leading Western Australian medical researchers.

The proposed 'Joondalup Family Health Study' would be a long-term health study of families living in the Joondalup area. These kinds of studies have proven invaluable for medical research, enhancing the understanding of the causes, treatment and prevention of many common diseases such as cancer, heart disease, asthma, obesity and diabetes.

The concept follows consideration by a group of leading researchers and health professionals from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR), The University of Western Australia (UWA), Lions Eye Institute (LEI), the Women's and Infant's Research Foundation, Edith Cowan University Joondalup Campus, and other academic, government and hospital partners. If the community agrees to participate, the study would be led by UWA Professor Lyle Palmer from WAIMR.

Professor Palmer said the concept had been endorsed by the Joondalup Health Campus, City of Joondalup Council, Australian Medical Association (WA Branch), Moore Federal MP, Dr Mal Washer, Joondalup MLA, Mr Tony O'Gorman, and the Health Department of WA.

"A successful WA example of such a study is the world-renowned Busselton Health Study. Since 1966, the Busselton Study has captured one community's health trends and highlighted ways in which people may improve their lifestyles and potentially decrease their risks of disease. The regular surveys and health interventions have been shown to result in improved health outcomes and lower death rates for the Busselton community," he said

Medical breakthroughs stemming from the Busselton Study include the discovery of two new asthma genes and the clarification of a genetic test for the blood disorder haemochromatosis, which causes iron overload. The Busselton Study has also provided important insights into the changing rates and natural history of a number of common diseases, including heart disease and cancer.

Professor Palmer said a Joondalup Family Health Study would be a contemporary, metropolitan version of the Busselton Health Study, with a focus on families.

"Consultation with the Joondalup community is the current top priority in order to determine the interest of families in taking part. Our detailed research over the past 18 months has shown that Joondalup is an ideal location. There is a strong sense of community among Joondalup residents, it has a large population, a high proportion of young families and access to well-established education and health facilities," he said.

Beginning today an extensive process of community engagement with residents, Government and other key stakeholders will be undertaken to assess whether the Joondalup community would support a Family Health Study. A random selection of 7,500 Joondalup residents will receive a mailed questionnaire and information sheet about the proposal.

“An invitation to Joondalup residents to participate in a community forum at Arena Joondalup on December 10 will follow, along with detailed information about the proposed study. A key factor for success will be our ability to forge a strong and trusting partnership with the whole community, so we will be spending considerable time talking with Joondalup families to ensure they fully understand and support all aspects of it,” Professor Palmer said.

“Side-by-side with our belief that the study will lead to research breakthroughs, new treatments and better understanding of the causes of common diseases, we are committed to community ownership of research resources and to engaging the community in a partnership for the public good.”

The study will have a strong focus on families, and the health of both children and adults. All adults and children over six years of age who volunteer for the study will be asked to supply information about their lifestyle and diet, basic measurements like height and weight, undergo health checks including eye, heart and lung function and provide a blood sample. Further health surveys would likely take place every three years.

“Just as many people in Busselton have benefited from being part of that health study, we believe, if Joondalup community members want to participate in this study, they could also be likely to experience better health outcomes for chronic diseases conditions such as asthma and heart disease,” Professor Palmer said.

The community engagement process will take at least six months. No decision about the future of the proposed project would be made until this is complete. If given the go-ahead, a Joondalup Family Health Study could begin in late 2006.

Professor Palmer said if a Family Health Study was successful, consideration could be given to extending to a larger scale study involving other communities in Western Australia and in the longer term possibly the whole state.

“By undertaking such a large and comprehensive community-based study of families, our findings will be of national and international importance,” he said.

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MEDIA BACKGROUND

Benefits of a Family Health Study

The Busselton Health Study (bsn.uwa.edu.au/surveys.htm) has been ongoing since 1966, with residents continuing to provide health information to researchers. Over the course of the study, the data collected has led to improved health outcomes in a number of chronic diseases, such as asthma and heart disease. For example, the Study has led to the discovery of two new asthma genes and the creation of a genetic test for the blood disorder haemochromatosis, which causes excessive iron accumulation.

The proposed Joondalup Family Health study would focus on the health of both children and adults and investigate risk factors for health problems that run in families, such as cancer, diabetes, obesity, heart disease and asthma. It would also look at how social and environmental issues may influence health.

If it went ahead, the study would deliver a first-class resource that would be likely to lead to breakthroughs in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, and the promotion of health for Joondalup residents, future generations of their families and for the wider national and international community.

What would volunteer participants be asked to do?

Participants who volunteer for the study would be asked to provide information on their lifestyle and diet, and undergo tests including lung, eye, and cardiovascular function, height and weight. Participants would also be asked to volunteer for a blood sample to be taken.

Information would likely be gathered from volunteer participants every 3 years as part of ongoing health surveys.

How can residents participate in the community consultation?

Every household in the City of Joondalup will receive information about the proposed Family Health Study in their letterboxes beginning from today.

A process of community consultation will get underway with a forum in December 2005. Residents of the City of Joondalup will be able to be part of the consultation process in a number of ways, including a phone query 'hotline' [(08) 9346 4782], a website [www.jfhs.org.au], by completing written surveys, and by participation in community forums.

What privacy and ethical safeguards will be in place?

Participation in a Joondalup Family Health Study would be entirely voluntary, and participants would be able to withdraw from the study at any time.

All information gathered in the proposed Joondalup Family Health Study would be handled according to strict confidentiality guidelines, and would be safeguarded by the Commonwealth privacy legislation, *The Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*.

The Joondalup Family Health Study will be overseen by the Human Research Ethics Committee from The University of Western Australia to ensure strict confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Any information used for health research purposes would not identify individual participants.

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