



**Western Australian Institute
for Medical Research**

April 24th, 2006

MEDIA STATEMENT

**NEW U.S. PARTNERSHIP PAVES THE WAY FOR BETTER HEART
HEALTH**

WA and US researchers are planning to team up to link two of the longest-running health studies in the world – in a move tipped to create new breakthroughs in tackling heart disease.

The international collaboration aims to combine information gathered from Western Australia's world-renowned Busselton Health Study, which was started in 1966 by Dr Kevin Cullen, with that from the equally famous Framingham Heart Study, which has been run by the American National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute since 1948.

Professor Lyle Palmer from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) and the Busselton Population Medical Research Foundation said the move was likely to lead to important discoveries.

“Both of these studies have generated very important breakthroughs that have impacted on the health of millions of people – so combining them will be very powerful indeed,” he said.

“By bringing together the health, DNA and lifestyle information of these critical resources, we will have an improved capacity to unlock the genetic and environmental causes of heart disease, which is one of our biggest killers.”

Professor Palmer said while progress had been made in determining some of the lifestyle and genetic factors affecting cardiovascular disease, it continued to be the greatest health issue facing Australians.

Cardiologist Associate Professor Joe Hung from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and the Busselton Population Medical Research Foundation said that heart disease killed more people in Australia than any other disease.

“It also causes a phenomenal amount of sickness, reduced quality of life and disability,” he said.

“The situation is of course similar in the United States where it is the leading cause of death and serious illness, so it's clear these sorts of projects have the potential to save many lives.”

Heart Week runs from April 30 to May 6.

Cardiovascular disease (heart, stroke and blood vessel disease claimed the lives of more than 50,000 people in 2002 and accounted for 38 per cent of deaths across the country. It affects around 3.6 million Australians. *

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BACKGROUND

The Busselton Health Study has involved conducting regular surveys within the community since 1966. The Study has been shown to result in improved health outcomes and lower death rates for the Busselton community.

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.

The Framingham Heart Study was established in 1948 under the direction of the US-based National Heart Institute (now known as the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; NHLBI).

The researchers recruited 5,209 men and women between the ages of 30 and 62 from the town of Framingham, Massachusetts, and began the first round of extensive physical examinations and lifestyle interviews. The Study now involves three generations from the town.

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*From the Heart Foundation of Australia website

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