
NEWS RELEASE

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UNIQUE MOBILE LAB TO UNLOCK B.C.'S BONE-HEALTH SECRETS

VANCOUVER – Healthy Living and Sport Minister Ida Chong today unveiled the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility's mobile research lab, the first mobile lab of its kind in Canada, which is dedicated to better understanding mobility and bone health across the lifespan.

The mobile lab will travel to communities across the Lower Mainland and eventually other areas of the province, visiting senior, child, and adolescent health populations to collect information on mobility and bone health.

"In B.C., falls among seniors result in over 4,000 hip fractures annually and approximately 20 per cent die within a year," said Chong, who unveiled the research lab at an event at Vancouver General Hospital. "This mobile lab is an innovative way for us to meet the current and future needs of our aging population by providing information on the most effective solutions to prevent, detect and treat problems that affect bones and joints before they cause deterioration and damage."

The unit cost around \$500,000 including the truck and trailer, with an additional \$500,000 to equip it. The mobile lab is funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation's (CFI) innovation fund, the British Columbia Knowledge Development Fund (BCKDF) and a number of private donors, including donors to the VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation, through a 40-40-20 split. The lab is part of a larger CFI/BCKDF and Ministry of Health Services-funded program, the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility. The Ministry of Health Services provided one-time funding of \$10 million to support the work of the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility.

On average in B.C., fall-related hip fractures among seniors cost the province over \$75 million each year in direct hospital expenses.

"Our mobile research lab will reach previously unstudied and hard-to-reach populations of seniors and youth, and help create a road map for healthy aging" said Dr. Heather McKay, director, Centre for Hip Health and Mobility. "The information we collect will identify trends in bone health and mobility across the lifespan. In other words, we can see how and why in certain age groups or communities bone health remains strong or deteriorates. Our investigators will also look at how mobility affects cognition and vice versa."

The lab will allow researchers to conduct tests on participants that may include: bone imaging, physical activity, muscle function, falls risk, as well as cognitive function in seniors.

“This new mobile lab will enable researchers to perform their cutting-edge work right here in British Columbia,” said Dr. Eliot Phillipson, president and CEO of the CFI. “The Centre for Hip Health and Mobility Mobile Research Lab is an impressive example of the type of partnerships that are essential to ensure Canada’s success in the knowledge-based economy and the CFI is proud to be a partner in this venture. This facility represents what the CFI is all about: providing the tools to institutions and researchers so that they can do the leading edge research that will benefit all Canadians.”

The mobile lab unit also houses state-of-the art equipment for bone-imaging, and falls risk screening tools for population-based research. The equipment in the lab is capable of evaluating bone mass and strength in 3-D, measuring total bone, fat and muscle mass in the body and, predicting the future risk of falls with 75 per cent accuracy.

“The mobile lab is illustrative of the type of translational research we support at Vancouver Coastal Health,” said Dr. David Ostrow, president and CEO, Vancouver Coastal Health. “Data made available by the lab, along with other important research from the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility, will assist in providing improved care and solutions for patients. An excellent example of this are the VCH Fall Prevention Clinics, which were developed based on earlier research presented by the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility, and have been effective in preventing falls in the senior population.”

The unit will also allow researchers to assess diverse and remote populations that have until now been inaccessible due to lack of equipment in these areas. The data gathered will provide researchers with a representative sample of urban, rural and remote populations and will identify B.C.-specific trends in bone health and mobility.

“This lab is another example of how the University of British Columbia’s Faculty of Medicine has become a province-wide enterprise,” said Dr. Gavin Stuart, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. “Just as we expand our educational programs throughout British Columbia, our researchers are also reaching farther afield to get the most comprehensive, diverse data about the health of the population of the province. The insights from that information will ultimately inform our teaching of future health professionals, and our continuing education programs for experienced physicians and therapists.”

Established in 2004, the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility (CHHM) is based at Vancouver General Hospital. The Centre is a partnership between the University of British Columbia’s Faculty of Medicine and Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) through the VCH Research Institute. CHHM is unique in its commitment to enhance mobility through bone and joint health as a means to enhance the quality of life for all Canadians.

One key focus of this internationally recognized research and teaching centre is the cluster of clinicians and scientists with particular expertise in hip health.

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