

# LEARNING, ENGAGING AND COMMUNICATING

## PROJECT ACTIVITY UPDATE

### Healthy Aging in Place: Improving rural seniors' health through policy and community level interventions

With the Healthy Aging in Place project moving into its next phase, the team has been busy with partner communities, presentations and knowledge translation.



In March, the team again made presentations at the Aging in American Conference in Chicago. The first focused on brain health and rural aging, looking at healthy older adults' perceptions, myths and

meanings of brain health, key practices and interventions. The second examined rural healthy aging in terms of access to information by looking at the nature and depth of information seniors require, the supports and barriers in accessing it, and recommendations for improvement.

In February, the team also launched the first study focusing on a three-month exercise intervention program for seniors with the communities of Watrous, Young and Wolseley. Nine peer leaders and 54 participants are taking part in the sessions. The program is designed to support mobility and enhance social interaction among seniors.

Last fall, the team made presentations at the Community-Based Research Showcase at the University of Regina and the 7th International Symposium: Safety and Health and Agricultural and Rural Populations: Global Perspectives (SHARP 2014) in Saskatoon.

As well, the team published an article, "Policy, community and kin: Interventions that support rural healthy aging," in *Activities, Adaptation and Aging*, 38(2), 138-155. (It can be found online at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01924788.2014.901067#abstract>.)

The team will wind up the three-month exercise program in May and move into the final rounds of Study 1 data collection, scheduled for May and August.

### Wuskiwiy-tan! (Let's Move!): Aging well in a northern Saskatchewan Métis Community

SPHERU has embarked on a five-year project with the Métis community of Île-à-la-Crosse in northern Saskatchewan to look into the needs of Métis seniors. Métis seniors have a lower health status than Canadians in general, and little is known about what Métis seniors need to age well and to age in place.

The team includes Principal Investigators Dr. Sylvia Abonyi and Dr. Sarah Oosman, along with SPHERU Co-Investigators Dr. Bonnie Jeffery, Dr. Shanthi Johnson, Dr. Nuelle Novik and Dr. Nazeem Muhajarine. Liz Durocher from Île-à-la-Crosse and Dr. Hassan Vatanparast from the University of Saskatchewan's School of Public Health will join the SPHERU investigators. T.J. Roy has joined as the Île-à-la-Crosse project coordinator.

The study, known as Wuskiwiy-tan! (Let's Move), is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and will use discussion groups, interviews and photo projects to reveal concepts and experiences associated with healthy aging. Participating seniors will also complete activity, diet and quality of life measures. Finally, formal and informal supports and services available in the community will be systematically identified, with a selection undergoing evaluation.



Along with effectiveness of selected interventions, gaps and overlaps between them will be identified. Graduate student and community trainees will be involved in all stages of data collection, and in the design, piloting and evaluation of smaller-scale interventions. The findings will enhance aging-well strategies in the research community, and more broadly in other Indigenous communities that are looking to improve health status. The community launch for this project will take place in Île-à-la-Crosse on May 8, 2015.

#### WHO WE ARE

SPHERU is an interdisciplinary team of population health researchers at the Universities of Regina and Saskatchewan. The bi-university unit conducts policy-relevant research focused on population health interventions and exploring ways to address inequities on the social determinants of health. To find out more about SPHERU, visit our website at [www.spheru.ca](http://www.spheru.ca).

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

### SPHERU part of next SPOR phase

SPHERU is providing leadership in a Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) provincial network to encourage better patient outcomes. CIHR will provide \$500,000 over five years to match the amount provided by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, and partners, the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon Health Region.

### Johnson spends semester as Fulbright

Dr. Shanthi Johnson is one of 11 Fulbright Canada scholars for 2014-15. For her project, she will look at nutrition and food-related policies in nursing homes as well as falls and injury prevention policies within the

active aging framework in Florida and Saskatchewan. The Fulbright Canada project is a partnership with the Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging, University of South Florida.



### Two new post docs

SPHERU has two new post doctoral fellows. Dr. Amanda LaVallee is working under the direction of Dr. Sylvia Abonyi and Dr. Sarah Oosman on the Wuskiwiy-tan! (Let's Move!) research project. As well, Dr. Andrew Hatala is working under the direction of Abonyi to conduct a community-based research project identifying strategies of resilience and mental health among inner-city Indigenous youth.

## MEET OUR RESEARCHERS

*Dr. Bonnie Jeffery is Lead Principal Investigator on our Healthy Aging in Place project, funded by a Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation group grant. (The action plan is online at [http://www.spheru.ca/research\\_projects/projects/Project.pdf/Healthy-Aging-in-Place-Action-Plan.pdf](http://www.spheru.ca/research_projects/projects/Project.pdf/Healthy-Aging-in-Place-Action-Plan.pdf).)*

### Q. What are some of the challenges for seniors in rural areas?

In our earlier study, the older adults in rural areas identified a number of challenges, many beyond the formal health care system. There was concern about access to doctors, pharmacists and health care, but there was as much discussion about other factors that can support their ability to age successfully in their communities like accessible transportation; access to home care services; assistance with daily living activities; more accessible access to information; and a greater availability of a range of housing options.



### Q. What is happening right now for the study?

Right now we are in the middle of an intervention research study, which is a three-month group and home-based exercise program to enhance mobility and social interaction for rural older adults. The intervention has been implemented in the communities of Young, Watrous and Wolseley and currently has 56 participants. We are delivering the intervention with Forever...*in motion* program at both the Saskatoon and Regina Qu'Appelle Health Regions. The program will be completed in mid-May, and shortly after we will be conducting follow-up data collection and interviews with participants.

### Q. How does the latest project dovetail with work from the previous Healthy Aging in Place project?

This project includes three studies resulting directly from the previous Health Aging in Place project. In that project we interviewed older rural adults over a three-year period to understand the supports they need to continue to live in their communities. In consultation with community leaders from the rural communities, we decided on the three specific studies: 1) assessing the community-based exercise program on mobility and social interaction outcomes; 2) assessing the built environment and 3) conducting a study to design an intervention to respond to the information needs identified by rural seniors.

### Q. How about compared with other research?

There is considerable interest in the supports that seniors need to "age in place" or, in other words, to have the choice to stay in their own communities. Other research has been very helpful, but much of it does not focus specifically on the situation of seniors in rural areas. We feel that our research will help fill this gap and provide interventions or supports for other rural communities.

### Q. What's next for the project?

In June we will be starting the second study, with a focus on the rural built environment to assess factors that support or challenge seniors' mobility. We will be completing an observational community audit supported by innovative use of mapping technology, key informant interviews and qualitative walking interviews with a sample of seniors in Young, Watrous, Rosetown and Wolseley.