

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Gates Foundation backs University baby research designed to help us be healthier

A University of Tasmania research team in Launceston has had its research into body composition of healthy infants backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The University team, within the Faculty of Health's School of Health Sciences, will be part of an international effort assessing healthy Tasmanian infants at select points from birth to six months.

Similar information will be collected by teams in South Africa and India as part of research which focuses on body composition and nutrition.

The \$440,000 grant will enable the appointment of additional research staff and purchase of cutting-edge, Launceston-based body composition assessment equipment for this and related studies.

Research lead and recently appointed Sports and Exercise Science Professor Andrew Hills said developing global reference standards for infant body composition, or the 'quality' of growth during the early years, was an important means of influencing later health outcomes.

"Low levels of physical activity and poor nutrition increase the risk of unhealthy weight gain in girls and women during the critical life stages of adolescence, pre-pregnancy and pregnancy," he said.

"There is strong evidence that the period from conception to two years of age is a critical window of opportunity to influence later health outcomes."

He said the research group, also comprising of Professor Nuala Byrne and Dr Steve Street, was keen to work with the community to help improve the health outcomes of Tasmanians.

“The research group is keen to explore collaborative research partnerships with industry and community groups to support this and other important health and education initiatives to prevent and manage overweight and obesity and improve physical activity levels of Tasmanians,” Professor Hills said.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Professor Brigid Heywood said the grant built on the strong pedigree of the University’s research effort into public health issues of State, national and global importance.

“In this field, our University is distinctive in having the individual and community at the heart of our research effort with particular strengths in human development, food and nutrition, and the application of innovative technologies to critical research questions,” she said.

MEDIA NOTE: Professor Andrew Hills is available for interview by phoning 0434 607 877.

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