

FACT SHEET

Atlantic Partnership for Tomorrow's Health (Atlantic Path)

Overview

The Partnership for Tomorrow's Health, or Atlantic Path as it is commonly known, is part of the Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project (www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca), the largest study of its kind ever undertaken in Canada. This \$42-million national study is exploring how cancer develops — examining the roles played by genetics, the environment, lifestyle, and behaviour. The study will follow the health of 300,000 volunteers in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada.

This research is particularly important on the East Coast, which has the highest cancer rates in Canada. Every year, more than 13,400 Atlantic Canadians are diagnosed with the disease and 6,300 die from it. Cancer truly does touch everyone living in this region.

Funding and Support

Nationwide, the study is funded by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, an independent agency established by the federal government to foster action on cancer control. Support is also provided by the Canadian Cancer Society.

Atlantic Path receives additional support from Dalhousie University, Cancer Care Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection, the New Brunswick Department of Health, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Health and Community Services, and the PEI Department of Health.

How the Study is Carried Out

Atlantic Path is recruiting 30,000 men and women ages 35 to 69 from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. These volunteers will visit one of the Atlantic Path Assessment Centres where they will answer questions about their health, diet and lifestyle. Standard physical measurements will be taken and the volunteers will also provide biological samples — blood, urine, saliva, and toenail clippings. Subsequently, researchers will follow their health for up to 30 years through hospital records, health-related databases, and cancer registries.

Assessment Centre Locations

The first Atlantic Path Assessment Centre opened in Halifax in early 2009, and the second in Sydney later the same year. Centres will also be established in the other three provinces.

Recruitment of Volunteers

In Halifax, thousands of people volunteered after stories appeared in the media and other recruitment initiatives enhanced awareness of the study. Similar strategies are being employed in Cape Breton, and will be subsequently used in the rest of the region.

In addition, individuals are being selected at random from Nova Scotia's Medical Services Insurance (MSI) database and invited to take part. (This information remains confidential until an individual calls to make an appointment; Atlantic Path is never told who has been contacted.) As Assessment Centres open across the region, a combination of direct invitation and general outreach to the public, local businesses and organizations will be undertaken.

How to Volunteer

Anyone who wants to volunteer can do so if they are between 35 and 69 years of age and are living in Atlantic Canada. An invitation is not required. Interested people are welcome to call Atlantic Path at 1-877-285-7284 (494-7284 in the Halifax area), or visit www.atlanticpath.ca to find the online form and mailing address. Volunteers are welcome regardless of medical history or current health status.

Duration of Study

Because of the long-term nature of Atlantic Path — following participants' health for up to three decades — many of the study's conclusions about the cause, control and prevention of cancer will not be reached for many years. Cancer and other chronic diseases can take a long time to develop. By analyzing samples and other data over an extended period, researchers hope to determine why some people develop a disease and others do not.

Project Goals

The overall goal is a reduced cancer rate and cancer morbidity rate for future generations. More specifically, Atlantic Path and the nationwide Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project will provide health researchers, planners, and policy-makers with vital knowledge including:

- a better understanding of the environmental, genetic and lifestyle factors likely to lead to cancer and other life-threatening diseases

- an assessment of the effectiveness of current prevention and public health programs across the country, which will aid in the development of future initiatives
- the opportunity to examine cancer outcomes over many years, expanding our knowledge of the disease and leading to the development of better methods of detection
- the ability to identify “biomarkers” — molecules in the bloodstream that can be used to diagnose cancer at its earliest, most treatable stages.

Additional Research Benefits

Although its focus is on cancer, Atlantic Path research will also shed light on risk, susceptibility and exposure for many other diseases. It will open the door to collaborative interdisciplinary research in many areas, and will provide, for example, the potential to combine epidemiological methods with basic science and geographic analysis. Investigations that could be approached in this way include questions about disease causation, such as the role of arsenic, air pollution, or pesticides on health outcomes.

A network has been formed, the Atlantic Path Research Network, to provide researchers with up-to-date information on study developments, and an interdisciplinary platform from which to make contacts and initiate collaborations. Health researchers are invited to join the Network and encouraged to contact the Atlantic Path for more information.