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## Media Release

### For Immediate Release

#### ***Halifax researchers receive funding to examine how lifestyle modification program may reduce risk of future strokes***

**HALIFAX** – Funded in partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation, a new Nova Scotia research project will investigate whether an intensive 12-week education and exercise program can reduce stroke risk factors in patients who have had mild or non-disabling strokes.

The team, led by Dalhousie University physiotherapist Dr. Marilyn MacKay-Lyons and Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre neurologist Dr. Gord Gubitz, will examine the timely delivery of stroke prevention strategies.

“By figuring out what lifestyle changes, particularly physical activity, diet, and medication adherence, are effective in reducing cardiovascular risk factors, our research will help people who have had a small stroke avoid a second, and potentially bigger and more disabling one,” says Dr. MacKay-Lyons. “The impact of this new knowledge could be significant, given 50,000 strokes occur in Canada each year.”

This is one of three research teams across Canada to receive approximately \$600,000 in special funding over the next three years through the Secondary Stroke Prevention Health Services and Care research initiative, a Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada-led partnership with the Canadian Stroke Network and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

“Projects such as this coupled with the province’s commitment to implement a long-term stroke strategy will go even further to address health outcomes for Nova Scotians and Canadians affected by stroke,” says Elaine Shelton, interim co-CEO and Director of Health Promotion for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia.

The innovative three-year project – Program of Rehabilitative Exercise and Education to avert Vascular Events after Non-disabling stroke and Transient ischemic attack (PREVENT) – incorporates strategies known to help improve risk factor reduction; provides a comparison between urban and rural settings, where the incidence of cardiovascular morbidity is particularly high; and compares health costs to determine whether PREVENT is sustainable and cost-effective.

“Mild and non-disabling strokes are important warning signs that should not be overlooked, but survivors are often unaware of the potential danger that they face, and the changes that need to be made to reduce future risk for stroke, heart attack and death,” says Dr. Gubitz. “However, if the project demonstrates reduced risk factors in a more cost-effective manner, the results could be used to support improved care throughout Nova Scotia and Canada.”

The project involves 464 patients with mild or non-disabling strokes from Nova Scotia, who will be randomly assigned either to a community-based program of exercise and education or to clinic visits for health assessment, counseling, and education. The participants will be evaluated at baseline, 12 weeks, and at six and 12-month follow-up. The research team will measure, among other things, blood pressure,

cholesterol levels, physical activity rates, and smoking status at 12 months. They will also use questionnaires to look at depression and quality of life.

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Stroke is a leading cause of death and disability for Nova Scotians. Approximately 1,500 Nova Scotians experience a stroke each year. And of those who survive, more than half require ongoing assistance with daily activities. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia spearheaded the development of a stroke strategy that focuses on prevention, acute care, rehabilitation, and improved quality of life. The Foundation was an effective advocate for the strategy securing its adoption by the Nova Scotia government.

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**For more information:**

Amy Totten  
Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia  
902-423-7682 ext. 343  
[atotten@heartandstroke.ns.ca](mailto:atotten@heartandstroke.ns.ca)

## **BACKGROUNDER**

### **Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia**

The Heart and Stroke Foundation, a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living and advocacy.

### **Canadian Stroke Network**

The Canadian Stroke Network – one of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence – is a unique collaborative effort that brings together researchers, students, government, industry and the non-profit sector. At present, the Network has more than 100 researchers at 24 universities across the country.

### **Canadian Institutes of Health Research**

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is the Government of Canada’s agency for health research. CIHR’s mission is to create new scientific knowledge and to enable its translation into improved health, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened Canadian health-care system. Composed of 13 Institutes, CIHR provides leadership and support to nearly 12,000 health researchers and trainees across Canada. [www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca](http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca)

### **Projects Funded through the Secondary Stroke Prevention Health Services and Care initiative**

Project: Alberta Stroke Prevention in TIAs and Mild Strokes

Principal investigators: Coutts, Shelagh B. (University of Calgary) and Jeerakathil, Thomas J. (University of Alberta)

Funding: \$600,000

Project: Program of Rehabilitative Exercise and Education to avert Vascular Events after Non-disabling Stroke or Transient ischemic attack

Principal investigators: MacKay-Lyons, Marilyn J. (Dalhousie University) and Gubitza, Gordon J. (Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre)

Funding: \$598,775

Project: A Natural Experiment in Rapid TIA Care with Knowledge Transfer and Exchange

Principal investigators: Penn, Andrew M. W. (Vancouver Island Health Authority) and Maclure, Malcolm (University of Victoria)

Funding: \$599,146