



With you in the
fight for life

Avec vous dans
combat pour la

PROF. JOAN BOTTORFF

With nearly \$1 million in funding from the Canadian Cancer Society, researchers at the University of British Columbia and Athabasca University are collaborating with health-care agencies to target cancer prevention strategies in northern BC, where cancer incidence rates are the highest in the province.

Partners include the Canadian Cancer Society – BC and Yukon Division, the BC Cancer Agency, and Northern Health.

Prof. Joan Bottorff, director of the Institute for Healthy Living and Chronic Disease Prevention at UBC's Okanagan campus, is spearheading the multi-sector team of researchers and health professionals in two projects aimed at reducing the incidence of cancer in northern British Columbia.

“There is a pressing need for improved primary cancer prevention in northern BC, where mortality rates due to cancer are high in comparison to other health regions in British Columbia,” says Bottorff.

The smoking rate in northern BC is 24 per cent, substantially higher than the provincial average of 14 per cent, and the region has the highest rate of lung cancer in the province. As well, reports consistently show higher obesity levels in the Northern Health region. In 2009-10, 45 per cent of the BC population was considered obese or overweight, while the Northern Health region averaged 57 per cent. In particular, obesity rates among northern men are higher than the rest of the province.

“Based on the evidence, it was determined that smoking cessation, as well as healthy eating and active living among men, were key cancer prevention initiatives,” says Bottorff. “Avoiding tobacco, staying physically active throughout life, consuming a healthy diet, and maintaining a healthy weight have been shown to reduce one's lifetime risk of developing and dying from cancer.”

Due to the large size of the northern region and its dispersed populations, delivering cancer prevention services is challenging, making it difficult for any one organization to have a significant and lasting impact.

Strengthening primary cancer prevention programs in Northern BC

Researchers take a collaborative approach to disease-prevention strategies



To address the issue, Bottorff and her team are developing and evaluating approaches for delivering two cooperative cancer prevention projects specifically tailored for northern BC communities.

“This is a really exciting opportunity to further support the great work of the three

agencies,” says Lucy Beck, regional director, public health protection, Northern Health Authority. “We need to continually work together to ensure we are providing strong and unified services to northerners, and our collective impact on this work moves us in the right direction.”

Prof. Joan Bottorff is leading two major projects in cancer prevention in Northern BC.

The first project is titled Stop Smoking Before Surgery, and is being implemented in the two pilot communities of Prince George and Prince Rupert.

“Many people do not know that stopping smoking eight weeks before surgery leads to improved recovery and often a shorter hospital stay. This initiative is an excellent opportunity to showcase an innovative partnership approach to primary cancer prevention that grew out of the northern cancer control strategy,” says Sonia Lamont, provincial director, prevention programs, BC Cancer Agency.

“The importance of primary cancer prevention cannot be overstated. By implementing what we know today about the main preventable risk factors for cancer, more than 40 per cent of cancers can be prevented. This is very important for British Columbians to know so that action can be taken towards healthier lifestyle choices.”

Project two, titled Men's Healthy Eating and Active Living, is taking place in Prince George and Dawson Creek. It focuses on the research and development of new and innovative programs and services promoting healthy eating and active living among men.

“In Canada, the rate at which new cancer cases are diagnosed continues to rise, placing greater demands on healthcare systems,” says Margaret Jones-Bricker, regional director, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon Division. “The best way to control cancer is to prevent it. By working together, we can combine resources to create a strong regional prevention initiative in northern BC.”

“Harmonizing cancer prevention services will have an impact on the region's burden of cancer, and will also inform how other Canadian regions can deliver similar programs.”