Australia’s first Healthy Lifestyle Research Centre to tackle obesity

Australia’s first healthy lifestyle research facility - which will develop novel intervention strategies for people with, or at risk of, the complications of obesity - will be opened in Melbourne on Friday, 12 November.

A powerful resource in the fight against Australia’s obesity epidemic, this pioneering facility will be officially opened by the Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, along with the Victor Smorgon Diabetes Centre.

The facility, which includes a state-of-the-art research gymnasium, metabolic kitchen and clinical research rooms to carry out physiological studies, is one of only a few in the world to take a ‘whole of day approach’ to understand and improve an individual’s health.

Thanks to Commonwealth (Department of Health and Ageing) and State government (former Department of Human Services) funding, as well as philanthropic support, this multi-million dollar research facility will enable scientists to examine how genetic and environmental factors interact to regulate body weight and body composition as a basis for the development of lifestyle interventions.

The healthy lifestyle centre’s research program will provide the foundations for the ongoing development and testing of evidenced-based physical activity and nutrition intervention strategies which can be rolled out to families, communities and workplaces nationally.

Australia faces an an obesity epidemic, which will dramatically increase the rates of diabetes and heart disease in the coming decades. Current projections are alarming, with obesity rates expected to double over the next 15 years resulting in over 7 million obese Australians.

Physical activity plays a pivotal role in the prevention of obesity and its complications (such as diabetes and heart disease) and over the past 25 years, Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute has played a leading role in research which underpins the benefits of exercise in reducing heart disease and diabetes.

Head of Metabolism and Obesity at Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, Professor Bronwyn Kingwell says there is an emerging field of research that shows how prolonged periods of inactivity can affect the body’s processing of fats and other substances that contribute to chronic disease.

“The absence of movement can slow down our metabolic processes,” Professor Kingwell says.

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“Despite this knowledge, more than 50 per cent of Australians do not perform regular physical activity.

“The challenge for researchers is to develop physical activity interventions which can be easily integrated into daily routines and be sustainable throughout the lifespan.

“It is anticipated that a lot of this research will then form the basis of public health prevention strategies.”

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