

# Health minister volunteers for B.C.'s biggest health research study

BY PAMELA FAYERMAN, VANCOUVER SUN JUNE 7, 2010



BC Health Minister Kevin Falcon, a volunteer participant, visits BC Generations Clinic at the Diamond Centre, VGH, where he is shown getting his blood pressure measured. He also gave urine and blood samples.

**Photograph by:** Cameron Heryet, BC Cancer Agency

His blood was drawn, a urine sample given, and lung function, body fat, muscle mass and bone density measurements all taken when Health Minister Kevin Falcon volunteered for a 25-year health research study, the largest in B.C. history.

Falcon fits the simple criteria to enter the study: he's a B.C. resident between the ages of 40 and 69.

But BC Cancer Agency researchers conducting this province's portion of the national, \$42-million Canadian Partnership Against Cancer project still need 35,000 more volunteers. Although the study is operating with strict confidentiality controls, Falcon agreed to have his picture taken while getting his blood pressure taken in order to help boost awareness of the study.

Marilyn Borugian, project director of the B.C. portion of the study, called B.C. Generations, said Monday that data and biological specimens from 40,000 residents will be taken and stored. It will be used in thousands of studies exploring the causes of cancer and other diseases. Study results will benefit future generations.

Participants, who also have their waist and hips measured, and heart rate and blood pressure taken, are entering the study one of two ways: they either phone to volunteer (604-675-8221 or toll free 1-877-675-8221) or they are randomly contacted by a call centre.

About 5,000 Vancouver residents have already signed up. Now the researchers are about to start a big push in Surrey to get participants there involved. Eventually, researchers will focus on residents in Victoria, Prince George and Kelowna, to ensure a geographic diversity in study participants.

For his part, Falcon was initially asked whether he'd volunteer for the study when he was interviewed by this reporter late last fall. Borugian said when she read a reference to that in a Vancouver Sun story, she decided to follow up with a phone call to the health ministry.

"I got a hold of an administrative assistant to the health minister and asked if we could find a spot in his busy calendar so he could join. A time was scheduled. Mr. Falcon was very interested. He recently became a father for the first time. As you get older and have children, you realize the importance of this kind of research," she said.

In an e-mail response to a Sun question about his involvement in the study, Falcon said: "When I first heard about the research project, I felt that it was important to participate as chronic diseases touch all of our lives. Not only can we reduce the chance of being diagnosed with a chronic disease through healthy lifestyle choices, but by participating in projects like this, we can provide health professionals with information to help this and future generations address one of the largest challenges facing our health care system today."

Participants must also fill out an 11-page medical history questionnaire that asks about medical conditions, procedures, use of medications, vitamins and supplements, and family medical history. As well, participants must answer a 45-page health and lifestyle questionnaire. The forms take anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes to complete.

Across the country, 300,000 Canadians will be enrolled in the study. The entire group will be followed and some will undoubtedly develop diseases, including cancer. By gathering information about environmental, occupational, infectious and lifestyle exposures, researchers hope to find connections or associations in those who develop diseases like cancer.

Health information will be coded to protect individuals' identities. More information about privacy and security provisions for the project are available at: [www.bcgenerationsproject.ca](http://www.bcgenerationsproject.ca)

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