

## HNR Involved in new unit to encourage healthier habits

### Behaviour and Health Research Unit

#### **GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES NEW CAMBRIDGE RESEARCH UNIT TO HELP ENCOURAGE HEALTHIER HABITS**

A new research unit based at the University of Cambridge will help inform the Government's policy making on behaviour and health by investigating the best ways to help people to change poor health habits for the better. Announced in the Government's recent Public Health White Paper, and funded as part of the of the Department of Health Policy Research Programme 2010 – 2015, the Policy Research Unit on Behaviour and Health will contribute to national public health efforts to help people achieve sustained changes in behaviour that lead to better health outcomes in all social groups.

Poor diet, lack of physical activity, smoking and alcohol consumption are together responsible for the huge burden of chronic disease worldwide. They also contribute to the differences in life expectancy between the poorest and the richest in the UK and elsewhere. But while most people value their health, many persist in behaviour that undermines it. Enabling people to permanently change their health-related behaviour is something the Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley, has described as '*the great challenge for public health*'. The new unit will contribute evidence to help to meet the public health challenge by initially focusing on diet, physical activity, smoking and alcohol consumption and looking in particular at our environments – where we live and work – to see what can be changed to prompt people to behave in ways that improve their health for the long term.

Professor Theresa Marteau, Director of the Policy Research Unit on Behaviour and Health at the University of Cambridge says: "*Achieving sustained behaviour change that leads to improved health outcomes and reduces inequalities is a key public health challenge and we are delighted to receive Government support to drive forward research to inform policy in this area. The new unit brings together a group of excellent researchers to find the methods that are most effective and present best value for money in changing people's behaviour to improve the health of our population. This will help ensure that Government policy decisions can be informed by robust evidence and offer the best value for money.*"

Regius Professor of Physic for the University of Cambridge, Professor Patrick Sissons says: "*The School of Clinical Medicine is delighted by the Department of Health's decision to place this new policy research unit in Cambridge and welcomes this continued government investment in the University of Cambridge. The new unit will synergise with existing research in population health sciences in Cambridge and the region, and will promote research collaborations between world class research programmes spanning neuroscience, epidemiology and the behavioural sciences.*"

The Policy Research Unit on Behaviour and Health is led by a team of experts from the University of Cambridge, **MRC Human Nutrition Research** in Cambridge, MRC Epidemiology Unit in Cambridge, RAND Europe and the University of East Anglia, with internationally recognised expertise in behaviour and behaviour change, evidence synthesis and statistical methods. It is funded as part of the Department of Health Policy Research Programme 2010 - 2015.

Located within the University of Cambridge in the Institute of Public Health, the new unit will be known as the Behaviour and Health Research Unit (BHRU).

For more information please visit [www.BHRU.iph.cam.ac.uk](http://www.BHRU.iph.cam.ac.uk).