



Press Release

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Genetic study seeks people with Northern Isles ancestry

People with at least two grandparents who were born in Orkney or Shetland are being asked to join a genetic study aimed at improving medical treatments.

Some 4,000 people will be invited to take part in the study, which will seek to better understand the causes of conditions such as diabetes, stroke, heart disease, cancer and others. Researchers hope the findings will lead to new treatments for these conditions.

The unique genetic identity of those with Northern Isles ancestry offers a rare opportunity to give a detailed picture on how genes are implicated in health.

Those taking part of the University of Edinburgh study – called VIKING II - will complete an online questionnaire about their health and lifestyle. They will also return by post a saliva sample kit, which will be analysed by researchers including genetic sequencing.

The study is not limited to those who currently live in Orkney or Shetland. Those who are part of the global Northern Isles diaspora can also take part. There are significant numbers of diaspora from the Northern Isles to be living in Saskatchewan, Canada; Chicago, USA; and Dunedin, New Zealand, among many other parts of the world.

For those living in the UK who volunteer to be part of the study, they can choose to have information on limited genetic results returned to them through the NHS. This information could be useful in terms of their future healthcare, including taking preventive actions to reduce the impact of health conditions.

Lead researcher, Professor Jim Wilson, said “Adding 4,000 more volunteers from these special populations will increase the scope and impact of our research into the genetics of health and disease. We hope in the long term, this will bring us a better understanding which is the basis of new approaches to treat or prevent disease.”

Professor Wendy Bickmore, Director of the MRC Human Genetics Unit at University of Edinburgh, said “This study can begin thanks to the recent five-year funding boost from the Medical Research Council to the MRC Human Genetics Unit. Research participants, patients and their families are at the heart of the Unit.”

The study also involves the University of Aberdeen and NHS Grampian clinical genetics doctors Professor Zosia Miedzybrodzka and Dr John Dean, who have been holding clinics in Shetland and Orkney for over 20 years.

Professor Miedzybrodzka said: “Better understanding the genetics of the Northern Isles will lead to better health care in the long run, both directly to the islanders but also worldwide”.

People who would like to take part can register their interest by visiting the study website:

www.ed.ac.uk/viking.



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