



## Media Release

# Weston Family Foundation funds \$12M initiative to advance the science of healthy aging

Hamilton, ON (Nov. 24, 2021) – The Weston Family Foundation is awarding a \$12-million research grant to the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), hosted at McMaster University, for a new initiative that will shed light on the many factors that influence brain health as we age, including lifestyle and the human microbiome.

The *Healthy Brains, Healthy Aging Initiative* will feature a cohort of 6,000 research participants who are currently enrolled in the CLSA. It marks the first time a national study of aging in Canada has introduced both brain imaging and microbiome analyses to investigate cognitive aging in the population over time.

The goal of the six-year *Healthy Brains, Healthy Aging Initiative* is to enhance the CLSA platform with longitudinal data from magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the brain and microbiome analyses of the gut, to help researchers examine how diverse lifestyle, medical, psychosocial, economic, and environmental factors as well as changes in the microbiome correlate with healthy aging outcomes. This data will be critical to the future development of screening and prevention strategies that promote brain health for aging Canadians.

The Weston Family Foundation has set an ambitious goal of improving and maintaining brain health in its overall efforts to improve the well-being of Canadians. The *Healthy Brains, Healthy Aging Initiative* and the resulting datasets could prove pivotal in these efforts.

“The influence of lifestyle factors and the human microbiome on brain health is an emerging and important piece of the healthy aging puzzle, but there is a lack of existing baseline research at a large scale,” said Emma Adamo, chair, Weston Family Foundation.

“We’re motivated to launch this initiative with the CLSA and McMaster University to enable researchers around the country to conduct further study and ultimately increase Canadians’ quality of life as they age.”

With more than 50,000 participants, the CLSA follows Canadian men and women for 20 years to better understand why some people remain healthier than others as they age.

“These enhancements to the CLSA research platform will provide researchers with critical data to better understand the basis of successful cognitive aging,” said professor Parminder Raina, lead principal investigator of the CLSA and scientific director of the McMaster Institute for Research on Aging.

“We thank the Weston Family Foundation for their generous support and commitment to this incredibly important area of study, which we hope will have an undeniable impact on the health of Canadians.”

Potential breakthroughs as a result of data gathered by the *Healthy Brains, Healthy Aging Initiative* will not only improve the health of Canadians as they age but will generate research evidence to inform policy and programs that increase the agency of Canadians on their own health outcomes.

### **About the *Healthy Brains, Healthy Aging Initiative***

The *Healthy Brains, Healthy Aging Initiative* is a six-year study, funded by the Weston Family Foundation, that will create new datasets to enhance the CLSA database and facilitate independent research into the link between lifestyle, the human microbiome, and brain health. The study will involve 6,000 research participants enrolled in the CLSA, including more than 2,500 who will undergo magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to monitor brain structure and function as they age. The resulting standardized datasets will be available for use by approved public-sector researchers in Canada and internationally.

### **About the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging**

The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) is a large, national research platform on health and aging allowing researchers to answer critical questions on the biological, medical, psychological, social, lifestyle and economic aspects of aging, disability and disease. The CLSA follows 51,338 men and women, who were aged 45 to 85 at recruitment, for 20 years. The aim of the CLSA is to find ways to help us live long and live well, and to understand why some people age in healthy fashion while others do not. The addition of brain imaging and gut microbiome assessments to the CLSA will provide researchers in Canada and around the world with critical data to better understand the basis of successful cognitive aging.

### **About the Weston Family Foundation**

At the Weston Family Foundation (formerly The W. Garfield Weston Foundation), more than 60 years of philanthropy has taught us that there’s a relationship between healthy landscapes and healthy people. That’s why we champion world-class health

research and innovation with the same passion that we support initiatives to protect and restore biodiversity on our unique landscapes. We take a collaborative approach to philanthropy, working alongside forward-thinking partners to advance Canada and create lasting impacts. We aspire to do more than provide funding, to enable others to find transformational ways to improve the well-being of Canadians.

### **About McMaster University**

McMaster University, one of four Canadian universities listed among the Top 100 universities in the world, is renowned for its innovation in both learning and discovery. It has a student population of 34,000, and more than 195,000 alumni in 162 countries. The Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine has a global reputation for educational advancement and is internationally known for its research intensity and development of evidence-based medicine.

### **Editors:**

Pictures of Parminder Raina may be found at:

<https://macdrive.mcmaster.ca/d/b277b95a35844987b2ba/>.

Photo credit: McMaster University

Cutline: Parminder Raina, a professor at McMaster University and lead principal investigator of the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), stands in front of an MRI at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton's Imaging Research Centre, one of eight research sites supporting the CLSA's new Healthy Brains, Healthy Aging Initiative.

For information, please contact:

Veronica McGuire

Media Relations

Faculty of Health Sciences

McMaster University

289-776-6952

[vmcguir@mcmaster.ca](mailto:vmcguir@mcmaster.ca)