
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Advanced Education

GOVERNMENT FUNDS EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH

VANCOUVER – The Province is funding research at the University of British Columbia on how early environments affect the development of young children with a \$2.25 million endowment for the Sunny Hill Health Centre B.C. Leadership Chair in Early Childhood Development, Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell announced today.

Leadership Chair recipient Dr. Thomas Boyce is a pediatrician and a recognized leader in the field of psychobiology, researching how different social experiences affect early human development and influence health, learning and behaviour.

Boyce and his colleagues are seeking to understand how genes and early social experience can work together to influence a child's health and development over time. Focused on disorders of mental and physical health in early life, his work offers new insights into why children growing up in stressful or impoverished circumstances sustain a larger share of illness and misfortune. His work also helps explain why some children are exceptionally vulnerable to the health effects of a difficult upbringing and why others are exceptionally resilient.

“Greater understanding of the factors influencing at-risk children will lead to the development of interventions that will provide healthier outcomes for these children,” Coell said. “Dr. Boyce’s work will benefit the children of British Columbia particularly and further strengthens the world-class research taking place in our province.”

Dr. Boyce will lead these studies within the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), a multi-university research institute based at UBC and the Centre for Community Child Health Research (CCCHR) within the Child & Family Research Institute. HELP is directing a world-leading contribution to new understandings and approaches to early child development from before birth to age six. Both HELP and the CCCHR work collaboratively with the common goal to understand the biological, behavioural and social factors that influence children’s health and development.

“This generous support will allow us to build on prior work to better understand how different social experiences ‘get under the skin’ to affect children's health and development,” said Boyce. “The data will help us design interventions to ensure that children have the solid foundation they need for leading healthy and successful lives.”

Funding for B.C. Leadership Chairs was established with an initial provincial commitment of \$45 million for the Province's Leading Edge Endowment Fund. Twenty leadership chairs will each receive a total endowment of up to \$4.5 million, which is cost-shared between the government and the private sector. Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children Foundation has committed matching funding of \$2.25 million for the Sunny Hill Health Centre B.C. Leadership Chair in Early Childhood Development. Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children Foundation is administered by the BC Children's Hospital Foundation. This is the province's seventh B.C. Leadership Chair. Thirteen more B.C. Leadership Chairs will be announced by the end of 2008.

Media Corinna Filion
contact: Communications Manager
 250 952-6400
 250 812-7977 (cell)

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