

Aging Gracefully: The Science of Living Well



A message from the CLSA Research Team

Welcome to **Aging Gracefully**, the newsletter for participants in the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA). As of July 2014, more than 40,000 of you have joined the CLSA. At this time last year, we had reached 26,000 participants. Thank you for your participation!

In this newsletter, we include the latest study updates and selected highlights from the past year. A snapshot of the CLSA participants to date provides information about how you rate your health, satisfaction with life and how you choose to participate in your communities.

For this issue, we are focusing on social health. As we age,

we experience changes not only in our physical health but also in our social networks. Past research has shown that social engagement – participation in a community – can lead to improved mental health and well-being. Lack of social engagement, on the other hand, has been shown to be associated with depression and increased vulnerability. To explore this topic, we speak with Dr. Andrew Wister, a CLSA researcher at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

We are also pleased to profile four CLSA participants (two in the English newsletter and two in the French version) who share their experiences about taking part in the study.

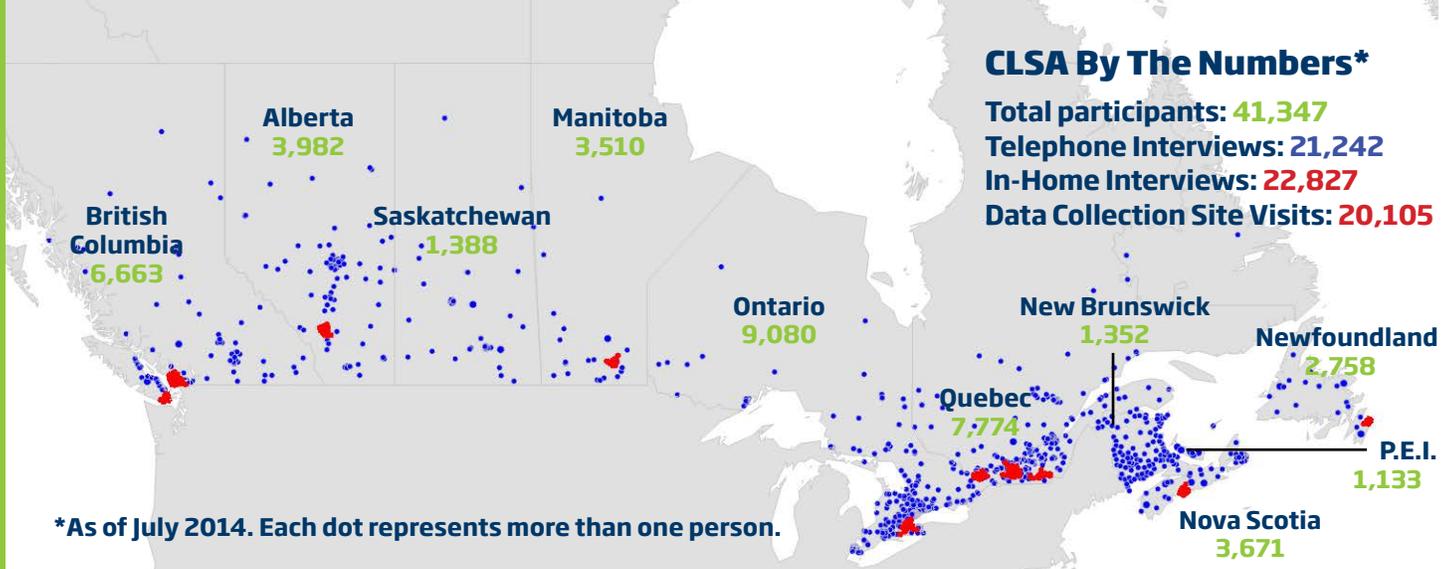
We hope you enjoy reading about what motivates them to stay active and involved.

It has been another exciting year for the CLSA. Recruitment for the telephone interviews is finished. Thank you to the more than 20,000 participants who took part. In June 2014, the data collected in those interviews were prepared so that researchers can start analyzing the information you have provided. To read more about the approved research projects, please visit the [CLSA website](http://www.clsa-elcv.ca).

Thank you again for your commitment to the study. We look forward to keeping you updated.



Left photo: University of Victoria students, Sarah Gibson and Johanna Berryman, presented on the CLSA during the Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Poster Session in March 2014; **Centre photo:** In May 2014, the CLSA's Vancouver site was officially launched with a public forum and ribbon-cutting involving CLSA team members (from left) Teresa Liu-Ambrose, Heather Stewart, Max Cynader and Susan Kirkland. **Right photo:** The CLSA offered public tours of the Hamilton and Ottawa (pictured) Data Collection Sites in spring 2014.



Who are CLSA Participants?

By Sex

48% Male ♂
52% Female ♀

By Age

26% are aged **45-54**
32% are aged **55-64**
23% are aged **65-74**
19% are aged **75-85**

Where do you live?

16% Rural

84% Urban



Who do you live with?

23% live by themselves
77% live with others

How do you rate your own health?



60% Excellent/Very Good
29% Good
11% Fair/Poor

Are you retired?

43% not retired
11% partly retired
46% completely retired



Are you satisfied with life?

86% Agree (smiley face)
4% Neutral (neutral face)
10% Disagree (sad face)

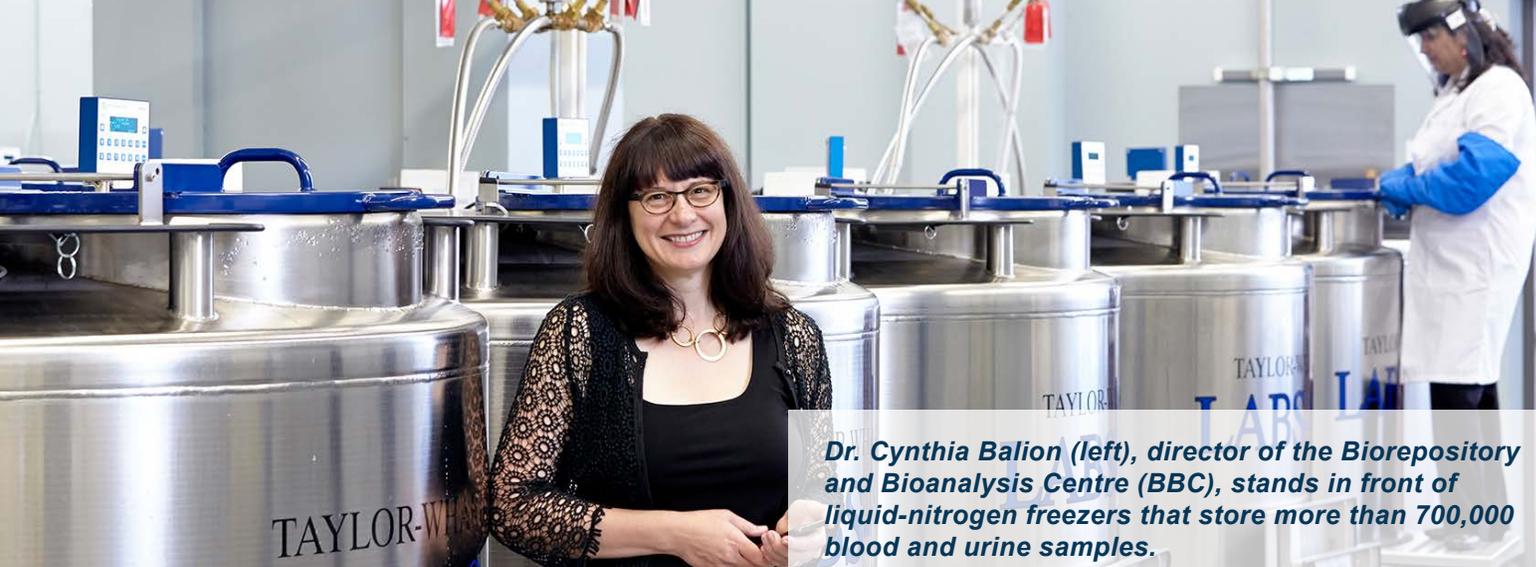
Do you participate in community-related activities at least once a week?

52% participated in family- or friendship-based activities outside the household (people icon)

52% participated in sports or physical activities (tennis racket icon)

19% participated in volunteer or charity work (gloves icon)

Disclaimer: These figures include all participants recruited as of July 2014 so the information is only partial and may not accurately reflect the characteristics of the full sample of 50,000.



Dr. Cynthia Balion (left), director of the Biorepository and Bioanalysis Centre (BBC), stands in front of liquid-nitrogen freezers that store more than 700,000 blood and urine samples.

How will the blood and urine samples be used in the CLSA?

After recruitment is finished, approved researchers will be able to use the blood and urine samples to study the biological processes associated with aging. Researchers will look at the molecular level for substances that show how the body is working. They will also perform analyses to identify new indicators of health, disease and aging.

The CLSA [Biorepository and Bioanalysis Centre \(BBC\)](#), located at McMaster University in Hamilton, is the central location for the storage and analysis of the blood and urine collected in the study. To date, more than 700,000 samples have been stored at the facility. To preserve the quality, the samples are kept in liquid-nitrogen freezers at -190 C. As a point of comparison, the coldest day on record in Antarctica was -93.2 C!

The BBC also houses a laboratory dedicated to the detailed analysis of the samples. The CLSA [Genetics and Epigenetics Centre](#), located at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, is the hub for the in-depth analysis of genes associated with aging and complex diseases.

CLSA on the web:

How to live to be 100:

<http://bit.ly/live-to-100>

Own our health: A change of attitude can lead to healthier aging:

<http://bit.ly/OwnYourHealth>

Older workers are not a burden on society:

<http://bit.ly/not-a-burden>

Are we living longer and better?

Study suggests yes:

<http://bit.ly/Live-Longer>

In the News

The CLSA maintaining contact interviews have started. These interviews are scheduled roughly 18 months after the initial telephone interview or Data Collection Site visit. They are conducted by phone and last approximately 35 minutes. The goal of these interviews is to keep in touch with participants and to ask some additional questions about health and well-being.

Keeping in Touch

Q&A: Social Aspects of Aging



Dr. Andrew Wister

Dr. Andrew Wister is chair and professor of the [Department of Gerontology at Simon Fraser University](#). He is a CLSA researcher and the Chair of the [National Seniors Council \(NSC\)](#). The NSC is currently engaging in a national consultation on social isolation among seniors.

What do you hope to learn about the social aspects of aging from the CLSA?

The CLSA is collecting information about social aspects of aging that change as we age, such as marital status, living arrangements, social support networks, caregiving and receiving, labour force status and retirement, as well as several quality of life indicators. When combined with health and illness information, we will be able to expand our knowledge of the factors (such as frailty) that lead one to be socially isolated, as well as the impact of social isolation on quality of life of seniors. We need good research to fully understand why it happens and how best to solve it when it occurs.

How important is social engagement as we age?

Social engagement, defined simply as maintaining high quality social relationships, is vital to fostering a healthy lifestyle as we age, feeling connected and a sense of belonging, being motivated to participate in physical activity and to eat well, and to feel empowered to give back to younger generations and society.

In 2010, a [National Seniors Council](#) report found that older adults – and society in general – benefit from active aging. For seniors, an active lifestyle can prolong independence, extend participation in the community and society, and help manage chronic illness and prevent poor health. For example, an

active mind may help ward off memory loss and enhance mental well-being, thus preventing the onset of illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

What are the impacts of social isolation?

Social isolation can lead one to feel depressed and cut off from society, to feel high levels of stress and anxiety, and may weaken the resilience that people require to cope with normal aspects of aging. This might range from simple day-to-day activities that are necessary for people to care for themselves to seeking professional medical care when necessary. Everyone has felt isolated at some time in their lives, but it is chronic isolation that can result in the most serious consequences.

What can people do to maintain strong social networks as they age?

One of the most important things people can do is to invest into their social relationships when they are younger, and maintain them as they age. Engaging in one's community by keeping active, whether that is through helping a neighbour, volunteering, or joining a seniors centre or organization, is fundamental to maintaining a strong network and reducing the possibility of chronic social isolation.

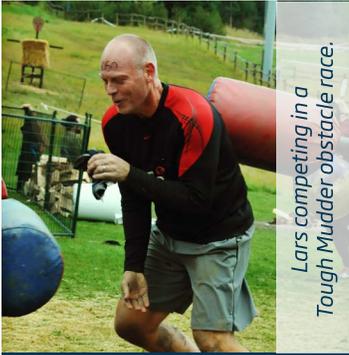
A 2010 [National Seniors Council report](#), which focused on volunteering among seniors and positive and active aging, found that community connectedness achieved from volunteering could deepen social networks, improve access to information and support, and reduce the likelihood of social isolation.

Not everyone can remain embedded in a strong social network due to unexpected experiences; therefore, we need to encourage community connectedness and support programs that improve social isolation when it does occur. Sometimes it only takes one person to make a difference in another person's life when they are feeling that they have no one to turn to for help.

For the full Q&A, visit:

www.clsa-elcv.ca

CLSA Champions



Lars
Langley, B.C.

Why did you agree to participate in the CLSA?

I was curious about the study to begin with and what exactly was being studied. The other reason is that my father participated in a cancer research study for 15 years that had semi-annual checkups. Even after he retired and moved to Vancouver Island he would take the ferry to the mainland to go to his checkups. I knew that if he could keep that long-term commitment, I could do something along the same lines.

What aspects of your participation in the CLSA do you find the most interesting?

I found the physical and questionnaire testing very thorough and, as I get older, it will be interesting to see how my sight, reflexes and hearing tests change. It was also interesting to see my results compared to others my age, and going forward, how changes in my health and fitness will impact the results.

Do you have any advice of aging well, or have you received any advice on aging well?

Up until my 50th birthday I had dreaded every single birthday because I didn't feel good about where I was physically, which impacted how I felt mentally. My wife and I decided to make some changes to our eating and exercise habits, but it wasn't any special diet. We just ate in moderation, making sure we burned more calories than we took in. Over the course of that year, I lost 50 pounds and am now able to do a lot more activities than I thought I would be doing at this age, including Tough Mudders. When my 50th birthday came around, I really embraced it because I felt good about myself physically. In the long-term, this exercise and diet change will add years to my life and improve the quality of my life in those years. I want to help show people that it is not too late at this age to start a program to make you feel better.



Susan
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Why did you agree to participate in the CLSA?

I have friends around the same age and we're all very different in our activity levels and health levels. I thought it would be interesting to see where I was at compared to other people. I was also going to be undergoing major surgery, and I thought it would be interesting to see if I lost any ground at the next visit after the surgery.

What aspects of your participation in the study do you find to be the most interesting?

I find the whole study interesting because it incorporates things that you don't normally get checked, like hearing and agility. Usually when you go to the doctor's, you go about an issue or for a physical, but they don't check everything the CLSA checks. I wasn't expecting that much detail.

Do you have any advice on aging well?

My husband has had Parkinson's disease for ten years. Compared to other people diagnosed at the same time, he's doing exceptionally better. When we received the diagnosis, I looked into it and found that the only thing you can do is exercise. We immediately enrolled in an extensive exercise program for seniors. It has really helped us. When I look at other people our age, we're much more active. We live a different lifestyle, and we're better for it.

Across the country, the CLSA has held a number of events to showcase the study, give back to participants and to provide an opportunity for the public to learn about the project.

The CLSA hosted two Café Scientifiques in the last year, inviting the public to engage in discussion about health aging. Videos are available on the [CLSA YouTube Channel](#).



Halifax Café Scientifique



Hamilton Café Scientifique

- “Living Longer, Living Better: Is there a secret to longevity?” was co-hosted by the Halifax CLSA site in October 2013.
- The Hamilton CLSA site hosted “Putting your heart into it: The science of cardiovascular aging” in February 2014.

Let us know how we're doing

We would appreciate your feedback on how to best provide you with study updates.

Please take a few minutes to fill in this online survey:



http://bit.ly/clsa_feedback

Thank you to our supporters

The CLSA is funded through support from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, provincial funders and partners as well as affiliated universities and research institutes.

Health Insurance Number Reminder

If you gave your consent to use your provincial health insurance number, but were unable to provide the number at the time of your interview, please contact the CLSA at 1-866-999-8303 so that we can update this information in your file.

For the latest CLSA updates visit:

Our website:
www.clsa-elcv.ca



Moving? Heading south for the winter?

Just a friendly reminder to let us know if your contact details change. Staying in touch with you is extremely important to us. If you have an email address, please let us know. Keeping in touch by email is a fraction of the cost of postage and helps us direct those resources towards CLSA research. You can provide us with this information by:

Web: www.clsa-elcv.ca/moving

Email: info@clsa-elcv.ca

Phone: 1-866-999-8303