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AGE-WELL launches research program on healthy aging technologies

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AGE-WELL, Canada's first research network to focus on technology and aging and co-led by Simon Fraser University gerontology professor Andrew Sixsmith, has launched its first slate of core research projects. These range from studies on assistive technologies and mobile robots, to the creation of wearable technologies and virtual games. SFU researchers are leading or collaborating on five of the 25 projects announced today, supported by a total of $5 million in funding.

"The projects we are launching today will put AGE-WELL at the forefront of research and innovation that will help seniors remain living independently and open new opportunities for Canadian business," says Sixsmith, who is also director of SFU's Gerontology Research Centre and serves as scientific director of AGE-WELL.

Among projects involving SFU researchers:

- **Pred-Fall: Technologies to Predict, Prevent and Detect Falls.** Led by SFU professor Steve Robinovitch (biomedical physiology and kinesiology) and a multidisciplinary team of SFU researchers, together with Fraser Health's Fabio Feldman.

  Falls are the largest cause of injuries of adults over 65. The project will develop and evaluate new technologies to predict, detect and prevent falls and fall-related injuries among people at high-risk in both long term and acute care environments. Researchers will analyze real life data, acquired both through networks of video cameras in long term care facilities and wearable sensors. Their goal is to identify differences in movement patterns during falls. The team will also develop and evaluate low cost solutions such as compliant flooring, fall mats and padded furniture along with wearable protective gear.

- **OA-Involve: Older Adults' Needs, Experiences and Preferences for Assistive Technologies**. Co-project lead: Judith Sixsmith, SFU public policy professor, with Susan Kirkland, Dalhousie University

  The aim is to develop best practices to support the active involvement of older adults in AGE-WELL projects. It will focus on understanding how to best incorporate the experience and insight of older adults in aging and technology.

- **Connect Play**. Project Lead: David Kaufman, SFU education professor, with Louise Sauvé of TELUQ

  The project's goal is to create, research and commercialize digital games to enhance older adults' quality of life. Research indicates that digital games can enhance older adults' happiness, cognitive development and facilitate social interaction.

While commercially produced games can cause usability challenges, many older adults readily embrace the concept of lifelong learning. The project will focus on social learning and will involve learning content and/or skills and will be played as social games with other adults or in an inter-generational format.

- **INToCARE: Innovation Technology for Caregivers.** Co-investigator: Andrew Wister, SFU gerontology professor (led by UBC and Laval University)

  Informal caregivers provide 75 per cent of the assistance needed for individuals with disabilities to remain in their communities. INToCARE will survey caregivers to better understand their needs and challenges as active partners, in the development of technologies that could alleviate their challenges.

- **COG-ASSESS: Automated Assessments of Cognitive Impairment Using Environment-based Sensing**. Co-investigator Norm O'Rourke, SFU associate psychology professor (led by the University of Alberta)

  The project will investigate how to monitor a person's daily-life activities through an easily available and inexpensive hardware-software system, in order to recognize changes that predict future cognitive decline. Commercial off-the-shelf sensors will be used including infrared sensors and cameras and sensor-embedded devices. Software will be designed for analyzing the data collected by these devices and to monitor and predict if an older adult will suffer from cognitive decline.

Sixsmith, who co-leads AGE-WELL with Alex Mihailidis, the Barbara G. Stymiest Chair in Rehabilitation Technology at the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute University Health Network (TRI-UHN) and the University of Toronto, says in addition to driving innovation at the national and global levels there will also be support for local initiatives that connect with the end users who stand to benefit most from the initiative's activities.

The Aging Gracefully across Environments to Ensure Well-Being, Engagement and Long Life (AGE-WELL) network is based at TRI-UHN with two core facilities at SFU's IRMACS Centre and at the iDAPT Centre for Rehabilitation Research at UHN.

Earlier this year AGE-WELL received $36.6 million in funding from the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) program.

As Canada's engaged university, SFU is defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement. SFU was founded almost 50 years ago with a mission to be a different kind of university—to bring an interdisciplinary approach to learning, embrace bold initiatives, and engage with communities near and far. Today, SFU is a leader amongst Canada's comprehensive research universities and is ranked one of the top universities in the world under 50 years of age. With campuses in British Columbia's three largest cities—Vancouver, Surrey and Burnaby—SFU has eight faculties, delivers almost 150 programs to over 30,000 students, and boasts more than 130,000 alumni in 130 countries around the world.

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