New Canada-wide initiative will prepare trainees and early career researchers to be future leaders in digital health solutions for older adults

Total investment is more than $13M over 6 years in federal funding, cash and in-kind contributions

A new federally-funded national training platform will equip graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and early career researchers to accelerate the delivery of digital health solutions for older Canadians with complex health needs and their caregivers.

The platform is one of 13 unique new training programs, funding for which was announced today by the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Canada's Minister of Health, and the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. The training programs are an initiative of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

The [Early Professionals, Inspired Careers in AgeTech (EPIC-AT) Health Research Training Platform](), powered by AGE-WELL, Canada's technology and aging network, is led by researchers from 11 universities and research hospitals across 6 Canadian provinces. EPIC-AT is hosted at the University of Toronto (U of T).

The competency-based, experiential learning platform is an extension of AGE-WELL's globally-leading EPIC training program and will provide one-year fellowships to at least 127 graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and early career researchers at Canadian institutions from 2022-2027. The focus is on digital health solutions for seniors with complex health needs.

Participants will be equipped to develop, implement and evaluate digital technology solutions across areas such as information and communication technologies (ICT), telemedicine, artificial intelligence, sensors, smart environments and wearables. These solutions will help older Canadians age safely, independently and with dignity in the setting of their choice.

CIHR is funding EPIC-AT at $2.4 million over six years. Funding is also being provided by the Strategy for Patient Oriented Research to empower and enable stakeholder engagement in platform programs. In addition, more than $6.1 million in cash and almost $4.5 million of in-kind support is being provided by 41 collaborating organizations from across Canada. These include public, not-for-profit and private sector organizations who are supporting participant salaries, sharing expertise, serving as mentors, hosting interns, developing online courses and more.

"This exciting initiative will boost the number of highly qualified future leaders in research, government, industry and community organizations – people who can get digital health solutions more quickly into the hands of older Canadians with complex health needs and their caregivers in home, community and long-term care settings," said Alex Mihailidis, nominated principal applicant for EPIC-AT, Professor and Associate Vice-President for International Partnerships at U of T, and Scientific Director & CEO of AGE-WELL, which is providing staff and infrastructure for EPIC-AT. "The pandemic has highlighted the potential of digital health

solutions – such as the rapid expansion of telehealth – to meet the needs of older adults, as well as the need for further work in this sector."

Professor Mihailidis welcomed the funding for EPIC-AT and the involvement of so many organizations across multiple sectors. "The time is now for Canada to emerge as a global leader for digital solutions in the AgeTech sector," he said. "Canadians are ready and willing to use digital health innovations, and their wide-scale use would have an immense positive impact on the lives of older adults, their caregivers and on the health care system."

Quick facts about EPIC-AT:

- The call for fellowship applications will open in Spring 2022; it will include focused calls for BIPOC awards.
- Successful graduate students and postdoctoral fellows will receive a minimum $8,000 of salary support, and early career researchers will receive a minimum of $10,000.
- Exceptional internships, mentorship and experiential education opportunities will abound, thanks to wide-ranging partnerships.
- Stakeholder engagement is core; platform participants will co-create solutions with older adults, caregivers, health professionals and others.

The 11 researchers and institutions collaborating to lead EPIC-AT are: nominated principal applicant Alex Mihailidis, U of T, and principal applicants: Nathalie Bier, Université de Montréal; Mohamed-Amine Choukou, University of Manitoba; Shannon Freeman, University of Northern British Columbia; Thomas Hadjistavropoulos, University of Regina; Karen Kobayashi, University of Victoria; Bianca Stern, Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care; Heidi Sveistrup, Bruyère Research Institute; Robyn Tamblyn, McGill University; Grace Warner, Dalhousie University; Azadeh Yadollahi, The KITE Research Institute-University Health Network.

To learn more about EPIC-AT, visit: https://agewell-epic.ca/

Read the CIHR Health Research Training Platform (HRTP) funding announcement here.

About AGE-WELL:
AGE-WELL NCE Inc. is Canada's Technology and Aging Network. The pan-Canadian network brings together researchers, older adults, caregivers, partner organizations and future leaders to accelerate the delivery of technology-based solutions that make a meaningful difference in the lives of Canadians. AGE-WELL researchers are producing technologies, services, policies and practices that improve quality of life for older adults and caregivers, and generate social and economic benefits for Canada. AGE-WELL is funded through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence program. www.agewell-nce.ca

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