

UNBC lands huge project

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UNBC's Dr. Laurie Chan (Submitted photo)

The largest research project ever led by UNBC, valued at \$11 million over 10 years, will study aboriginal environmental health along with the benefits and risks of eating traditional food in First Nations communities.

Led by UNBC's Dr. Laurie Chan, B.C. leadership chair in aboriginal environmental health, the research will be conducted in 100 Canadian communities with an aim to improving health levels among First Nations people. Information will be gathered relating to current practices of traditional and store-bought food and on the levels of nutrients and contaminants in traditional food and water.

"First Nations care about the safety of drinking water, chemical contaminants in the traditional food supply, water and soil contamination, indoor air quality and household mould," said Chan.

"We hope to provide services to communities in need and to bring awareness to the academic, regional and national levels on these important health issues. Shawn Atleo, B.C. Assembly of First Nations regional chief, said: "Our people's health is largely determined by the food we gather on the land. Our ancestors had very low rates of diseases and lived long healthy lives. We need our traditional foods to be safe and accessible in order to improve health in our communities."

A second initiative funded by the federal government involves the First Nations Environmental Health Innovation Network, a network affiliated with the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health.

The aim is to connect environmental health researchers with First Nations communities across Canada to build research capacity by providing First Nations with a one-stop shop on environmental health issues. The federal government is paying \$100,000 a year for the network.

"First Nations have told us they want to make informed decisions on their environment. To do this we need both sound scientific research and traditional knowledge. Our projects are about balancing the two," Chan said.

Federal Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq said the government is "pleased to provide" the funding for the two projects.

"These initiatives are important because they contribute to improving health outcomes in First Nations communities by increasing capacity and filling important gaps in research related to food, environment and health," she said. Both projects are funded by Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch.