



## Fairbanks Institute Readies for Enrollment of First Participant

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**A non-profit organization in Indianapolis is ready to launch its inaugural study by enrolling its first participant. The Fairbanks Institute for Healthy Communities has been working at a feverish pace for the last two years—all an effort to provide the medical community with an entirely new kind of resource for medical research. As part of its first study, it will begin building a database of medical information that's comprehensive, meticulously detailed and entirely focused on Hoosiers.**

"We want to make sure that everyone understands the Fairbanks Institute and why it's important to Indiana and the community," says Cynthia Helphingstine, president and chief operating officer at the Fairbanks Institute.

Created in 2006, the Fairbanks Institute is dedicated to enabling cutting edge medical research. The organization plans to gather information from thousands of participants in the Indiana Health Study and use this information to create one of the nation's most comprehensive resources for medical research. By making this resource available to medical researchers, the Fairbanks Institute hopes to fulfill its mission of facilitating research breakthroughs that lead to new and better ways to prevent, diagnose and treat some of the nation's most devastating diseases.

The Fairbanks Institute plans to begin collecting blood samples and information this month for its first study focused on cardiovascular disease. The Institute hopes to enroll 1,500 Hoosiers in the Indiana Health Study. The study participants will be divided into two groups: one will be composed of healthy individuals with no history of chronic disease; and the second group will have a history of coronary heart disease.

Helphingstine says she wants the study to represent "the diversity that exists here in the Indiana community by focusing, in particular, on recruiting minorities for the Indiana Health Study—whether that's Hispanics, African Americans, or any others represented in our area. Those groups have typically been under represented in a lot of research studies."

Dr. Anantha Shekhar, principal investigator for the study, describes the research as a "cutting-edge platform." He says the Indiana Health Study is unique because it involves following participants indefinitely, potentially for several decades, while meticulously documenting their lifestyle and changes to their health.

"That's the uniqueness of the study—the comprehensiveness and the prospective nature of the health care data," says Shekhar. "Currently, there's no such model in the U.S. It's very timely for [the medical industry] and for Indiana in general, because this is going to be the trend over the next 50 years in biomedical research." [Listen](#)

The Fairbanks Institute will gather blood samples and medical records of the participants. Helphingstine believes the depth and detail of the information the Institute is collecting will enable research that helps identify early indicators of cardiovascular disease, and ultimately, keep Hoosiers healthy.

"Researchers need to be able to study people in context of their daily lives, and that means not looking at just a biological sample in a vacuum," says Helphingstine. "They need to understand the medical history of that person and all of the clinical information that goes with that biological sample." [Listen](#)

Indianapolis physicians will be referring patients for the cardiovascular study. More than 340,000 Hoosiers have coronary heart disease, and Helphingstine believes that's one factor that makes Indiana an ideal location for long-term health studies like this one.

"Indiana is a health challenged community. There are high rates of chronic diseases here," says Helphingstine. "We have a lot of people who have diabetes and heart disease. We also have high rates of cancer here. We have the people here who have the diseases that researchers need to study to better understand what's causing it and how to treat it." [Listen](#)

While the cardiovascular study will follow participants for several decades, Helphingstine anticipates immediate benefits as well. Samples will be available for researchers as soon as they're collected. Additionally, Helphingstine believes having the Fairbanks Institute in full operation will add to the national prominence of Indiana's Life Sciences industry.

"Having this research platform available will allow academic researchers, in particular, to apply for different National Institutes of Health grants that will help them bring in extra funding to the region," says Helphingstine. "Funding for Life Sciences research is one of those things that's known to increase jobs and increase spending that benefits the whole economy."

Leaders at the Fairbanks Institute hope this first study will help lay a foundation for community trust in the organization. Study organizers say building community trust is vital, because the success of their organization relies on the participation of people in Indiana. Shekhar says most participants are concerned about their medical privacy, but he says Fairbanks takes every step to insure participants' information is protected through anonymity. [Listen](#)

In addition to launching its first study this month, the Fairbanks Institute is already planning its second study, which will focus on cancer. [Listen](#)

After two years of planning and preparation, leaders at the Fairbanks Institute say they're proud to begin the study. They hope the Indiana community will share their passion for attacking health problems by agreeing to participate in studies that could give doctors new insight on some of the nation's most widespread diseases.

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