

Wanted: Men aged 30 to 40 for study to map DNA of 100,000 Singaporeans

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SINGAPORE (The Straits Times/Asia News Network): Men aged 30 to 40 are needed for Singapore's quest to map the DNA of 100,000 Singaporeans as part of research to find new ways of predicting and preventing diseases here and in Asia.

Making this call on Friday (Dec 16) after the official launch of the study, its lead investigator, Professor John Chambers of Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine), said he has observed that working adults below 40, particularly men, find it difficult to make time for the study. It involves a check-up that lasts an average of about five hours.

When completed, the SG100K study will create one of the Republic's biggest research data sets, which will yield insights over the next three decades into the genetic basis for diseases in Singaporeans.

Since recruitment for the study began in January, nearly 20,000 people have signed up, said Prof Chambers, who is also chief scientific officer at Precision Health Research, Singapore.

Another 50,000 participants have been drawn from four existing cohort studies under LKCMedicine, National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, the Singapore Eye Research Institute, the Singapore National Eye Centre and the National Heart Centre Singapore.

Prof Chambers said: "So for this work to be relevant to everyone in Singapore, it's very important that we reach out and include all segments of Singapore society – the rich, the poor, the young, the old, men and women and also people of different social and cultural backgrounds."

Over the next three years, researchers will analyse the whole genomes of 100,000 Singaporeans aged 30 to 84, and other health data, to understand the social, environmental, lifestyle and genetic factors associated with diseases prevalent in Singapore and Asia.

Most knowledge of human health and diseases stems from the West, and special features of the Asian genome, lifestyle, environmental issues and predisposition to diseases are not entirely clear, said NTU's senior vice-president of health and life sciences and LKCMedicine's dean, Professor Joseph Sung.

With Malays and Indians comprising 40 per cent of participants, the project is slated to become one of Asia's leading reference genome databases, since Singapore's ethnic diversity captures more than 80 per cent of Asia's diversity.

Over the next two years, the institutions will work to recruit about 30,000 people, said NTU in a statement. Participants in the study will go for a health check-up that involves collecting blood samples, measuring blood pressure, and collecting information on physical fitness, lung function, body composition, skeletal health and cognitive performance, as well as glucose and cholesterol levels.

The study is open to Singaporeans and permanent residents of all ethnicities, aged 30 to 84, including people with pre-existing conditions. Each participant will receive a S\$50 token of appreciation after the check-up.

Over the course of the study, SG100K participants will be monitored for their long-term health outcomes through a combination of approaches, including electronic medical records, disease registries and invitations for further follow-up.

Among those who have volunteered are Health Minister Ong Ye Kung and Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health Rahayu Mahzam, who had their blood and skin samples taken on Friday.