

Thursday, 20 November 2014

Obesity researcher awarded inaugural Pacific health award

Obesity researcher **Dr Tupa'ilevaililigi Ridvan Firestone** has been awarded the Health Research Council of New Zealand's (HRC) new Pacific career development award worth \$300,000.

The HRC's Sir Thomas Davis Te Patu Kite Rangi Ariki Health Research Fellowship was offered for the first time this year to support high quality Pacific health research in priority areas. Dr Firestone, who is based at **Massey University's Centre for Public Health Research** in Wellington, will use the fellowship to develop an obesity intervention programme specifically for Pacific youth and young adults (16-24 years), an age group whose established lifestyle-related behaviours are, she says, still malleable to change.

"The simplistic view of obesity as an energy balance issue – calories in versus calories out – has not led to effective interventions. Instead, obesity is caused by interactions across a range of factors, including physiological, behavioural, and environmental drivers such as social marketing strategies of persuasive and pervasive food," says Dr Firestone.

"This project will develop an integrative approach to obesity intervention through empowering Pacific youth and multilevel partners to take ownership of this complicated problem. As a consequence, we expect results to be more effective than conventional approaches, which are merely asking people to make better choices."

Also to be awarded this inaugural research fellowship is **Dr Gerhard Sundborn** from **Le Va** who is going to explore Pasifika solutions to reducing sugar-sweetened beverage consumption in Pasifika youth.

Drs Firestone and Sundborn are two of more than 10 researchers to receive a combined total of \$1.3 million in Pacific health research funding as part of the HRC's career development award programme for 2015.

Pacific counsellor and health researcher **Mr Byron Seiuli** from the **University of Waikato** has received a Pacific Health Research Postdoctoral Fellowship worth \$335,000 to support

Pasifika adolescents and young adults experiencing mental health challenges related to their intimate partner relationships.

Mr Seiuli says there is a significant gap in published research on young Pasifika, despite teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections rates being higher among this group than the general population. He says this study will provide much-needed knowledge about the way to address Pasifika adolescent relationships and emerging mental health concerns.

“Understanding how social and cultural factors operate to influence young people’s intimate partner relationships is paramount to developing effective, targeted sexual and reproductive health programmes, and mental health care that arises from intimate relationships,” says Mr Seiuli.

HRC Project Manager, Pacific Health, Dr Nuhisifa Seve-Williams says these career development awards help to support some of New Zealand’s most promising emerging Pacific health researchers and address critical gaps in the health research workforce.

“High quality Pacific health research is an important part of reducing disparities in health outcomes, and lifting the health and well-being status of our Pacific peoples,” says Dr Seve-Williams.

See below for a list of all the HRC career development award recipients (Pacific health research category), or go to www.hrc.govt.nz/funding-opportunities/recipients.

2015 HRC career development awards (Pacific health research category*)

***Please see the HRC’s separate media releases for the recipients of the general and Māori health research categories**

Sir Thomas Davis Te Patu Kite Rangi Ariki Health Research Fellowship

Dr Tupa’ilevailigi Ridvan Firestone, Massey University, Wellington

Pacific health and obesity research

24 months, \$300,000

Telephone: 04 801 4987 Ext 63107

Dr Gerhard Sundborn, Le Va

Pacific solutions to reduce sugary drink consumption

24 months, \$300,000

Telephone: 09 373 7599

Pacific Health Research Postdoctoral Fellowship

Mr Byron Seiuli, University of Waikato

Hookin’ up – Mental health and Pasifika students intimate relationships

36 months, \$335,000

Telephone: 07 855 4650

Pacific Health Research PhD Scholarships

Mr Jarrod Moors, University of Otago, Dunedin
Lipid profiles as a risk factor for metabolic disease in Polynesians
36 months, \$88,550 plus fees
Telephone: 03 479 4167

Dr Faafetai Sopoaga, University of Otago, Dunedin
Pacific students' health, wellbeing and success in higher education
36 months, \$112,550
Telephone: 03 479 8493

Dr Bruce Su'a, The University of Auckland
Defining a biomarker profile for anastomotic leak following colon surgery
24 months, \$25,000
Telephone: 09 276 0044 Ext 2219

Ms Hana Tuisano, Victoria University of Wellington
Developing a Pacific youth health model
36 months, \$103,096
Telephone: 04 801 5799 Ext 8897

Pacific Health Research Masters Scholarship

Ms Manusiu Latu, The University of Auckland
Challenges of Tongan family caregivers caring for the elderly
12 months, \$14,115
Telephone: 09 259 4546

Pacific Health Research Summer Studentships

Ms Melbournemockba Mauiliu, University of Otago, Dunedin
Experiences of Pacific peoples in the Prospective Outcomes of Injury Study
10 weeks, \$5,000
Telephone: 03 4795482

Miss Alapasita Teu, University of Otago, Dunedin
Building a Pacific health research workforce: "What do our alumni suggest?"
10 weeks, \$5,000
Telephone: 03 4795888

Pacific Health Research Development Grant

Mrs Litiuingi Ahio, AUT University
Sustaining a community-based health initiative using digital technologies
6 months, \$10,000
Telephone: 09 270 9430

-Ends-

For more information about these projects, please contact the researchers direct. Contact telephone numbers are above.

For information about how the Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) functions, please contact Kristine Scherp, HRC Communications Group Manager, phone: (09) 303 5202 or email: kscherp@hrc.govt.nz.