



Media Release

Communiqué

Lakehead University researcher to lead national research team ensuring seniors are safe in vehicles

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Thunder Bay, ON: Injuries due to motor vehicle crashes are the second leading cause of accidental death for older people. When older vehicle occupants are injured, their recovery time is longer and less complete than younger people and can lead to a loss of independence and greater reliance on the health care and social service systems. A national research team being co-led by a Lakehead University professor is helping elderly drivers and passengers arrive safely. Dr. Michel Bédard, a psychology professor specializing in aging and health, is coordinating the team, which was recently awarded funding of up to \$338,000 from the AUTO21 Network of Centres of Excellence and several industry supporters. Dr. Jan Miller Polgar of the University of Western Ontario is the project's co-leader. Together, they will work with the team members from the University of Alberta, University of Manitoba, University of Ottawa, University of Waterloo and the University of Windsor.

Dr. Bédard says the project is comprised of two components. Researchers will review the effectiveness of driver re-training programs developed for seniors to determine whether such drivers perform better in on-road evaluations than those who don't. "Participation in such programs may help decrease the crash risks for elderly drivers and other road users."

The second component investigates how vehicle design can be enhanced to meet the needs of seniors. Previous studies show seniors have difficulty getting in and out of vehicles, using seatbelts and understanding the visual aspects of instrument panels.

"Lakehead University recognized that research – the creation and transfer of knowledge – is of utmost importance in this world. We are pleased and excited to see Dr. Bédard's involvement in such innovative and significant research projects like this," says Dr. Harun Rasid, Associate Vice-President (Research) at Lakehead University.

"We are pleased to support this innovative project that will enhance the safety of our roads for seniors and other users," says Dr. Peter Frise, CEO and Program Leader of AUTO21. "In addition to the knowledge created, the project provides an excellent training opportunity for nine students at the six universities to work with expert researchers and also collaborate with industry representatives. This experience will help develop the students into the innovators of Canada's future automotive sector."

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The project is one of seven new research projects worth a total of \$6.5 million being supported by the AUTO21 Network of Centres of Excellence and industry. AUTO21 is a federal program that supports 28 other auto-related R&D projects at 33 universities across Canada, with combined federal and industry funding of more than \$8 million per year. The new projects add 32 researchers and 53 student researchers to the AUTO21 investigative team. Over 250 university and industry researchers, and more than 250 graduate and post-graduate students are already part of the AUTO21 team. AUTO21 is funded by the Networks of Centres of Excellence of Canada program.

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