



## **For Immediate Release**

### **All Manitoba Media**

#### **Strong demand for safe diabetes exercise program**

People with type 2 diabetes are flocking to a Winnipeg pilot program that helps them learn to exercise safely and effectively.

The Community Fitness for Diabetes project, funded by the Winnipeg Foundation, and with a contribution from pharmaceutical companies Boehringer Ingelheim and Eli Lilly and Company, is an attempt by Wellness Institute and its partners, Youville Centre the YMCA-YWCA Winnipeg to fill a gap in diabetes education locally, but also demonstrate a way to help people with diabetes anywhere to improve their fitness level to control their diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes is a serious problem that is still growing in Manitoba, which has the highest rate of diabetes in the prairies provinces.

Three eight-week programs in three separate corners of the city are running during November which is Diabetes Month, and all three are completely full and have waiting lists.

To Wellness Institute Medical Advisor Dr. Kevin Saunders, that means patients agree there is a need for this type of program.

“We have diabetes education that helps patients with their diet, and medications we can prescribe, but other than encouraging patients to ‘just go exercise’ there isn’t really anywhere except this program that gives patients advice and support to face the challenges they have with getting active,” Dr. Saunders said.

It is well established that exercise can help control blood sugars, but it’s important that people with diabetes be medically screened before starting an exercise program. Some people have type 2 diabetes as a consequence of a sedentary lifestyle and after decades of inactivity, won’t feel comfortable or have the confidence to succeed in becoming active. The guidance of a Certified Exercise Physiologist can help get them started and on the path to a permanent lifestyle change.

“The medical literature shows that a lot more will be successful at getting active if we can get them started in a supportive group environment where they can build their confidence level and understand how much and what kind of exercise is safe for their body. After that they can get out on their own doing the same physical activity that anyone else does,” Saunders said.

So far that’s working well for participant Donna McCuskee, age 60, who felt overwhelmed when she was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and appreciated the support to learn that “being busy isn’t the same as exercising.”

David Beaulieu, age 42, appreciated being in a class with other people that have the same condition and challenges. In the exercise program he learned that “even though I might have problems doing one type of exercise, the instructor was able to find an alternate exercise to do.”

Both are more active after the program, which confirms an early finding of the project. Overall participants have not only increased their physical activity, they have also improved their knowledge about diabetes and their confidence to manage it on their own.

Wellness Institute Executive Director Casie Nishi says the project will establish a portable model for diabetes exercise programming that can be added to the diabetes education programs already funded by healthcare.

“As a medical fitness facility, we can provide the kind of guidance people with diabetes need a, and support them to be active in their community. We want to find a way we can provide that 8 week launch pad so that people with diabetes can feel confident to exercise safely in any recreational context whether that’s as a member of a YM-YWCA, or exercising at home,” she said.

The pilot wraps up after a winter session that runs from January to March. Nishi says that Wellness Institute will work with its partners on a final report, and look for ways to sustain and expand the program.

The Wellness Institute is going to keep running a diabetes exercise programming at its facility in northwest Winnipeg, but project organizers know the need is tremendous and everywhere, including rural and isolated communities.

“If we can provide a bit of support and guidance from Certified Exercise Physiologists, more of our friends, neighbours and family members with diabetes will be able to get the education and support they need to get started, and then engage in the recreation opportunities we already in our communities.,” Nishi said.