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## **NIH Selects Benton County, Arkansas Children's Hospital Research Institute, UAMS Researchers to Participate in National Study**

(LOWELL, ARK.) Oct. 3, 2008 – Benton County has been selected as a study center for the largest-ever investigation of child health, The National Children's Study. The National Institutes of Health announced today that it has awarded a \$14.4 million contract to the Arkansas Children's Hospital Research Institute (ACHRI) to facilitate the county's involvement.

The National Children's Study will follow a representative national sample of 100,000 children from before birth to age 21. Study volunteers will be recruited throughout the United States, from rural, urban, and suburban areas, from all income and educational levels, and from all racial groups. The study will investigate factors influencing the development of such conditions as autism, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, birth defects, diabetes, asthma and obesity.

The study in Benton County will be led by Dr. Charlotte Hobbs, MD, PhD, director of the Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention at ACHRI.

"This is something that the people of Benton County can certainly be proud of," said Hobbs, who also is an associate professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) College of Medicine and section chief of Birth Defects Research. "They'll be participating in a national study that will be a legacy for their children and children to come."

At a briefing today, NIH officials named ACHRI as one of 36 new and existing study centers which would recruit study volunteers from a total of 72 locations. When it is fully operational, the study is expected to include from 36 to 50 study centers in the planned 105 study locations throughout the United States.

Authorized by Congress in the Children's Health Act of 2000, the National Children's Study is being conducted by a consortium of federal agencies. This includes two NIH institutes, the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute of

Environmental Health Sciences, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

ACHRI will recruit participants from Benton County, collecting genetic, biological and environmental samples, and compiling statistical information for study analyses investigating how genetic and environmental factors influence health and disease.

At the briefing today, NIH officials said the study would yield health information throughout its 25-year span. Within just a few years, the study would provide information on disorders of pregnancy and birth. Since women would be recruited before they give birth, and in some instances even before they become pregnant, the study would provide insight into the causes and contributors of preterm birth.

More than 500,000 premature infants are born each year in the United States. Infants born prematurely are at risk for early death and a variety of health problems, such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and learning disabilities. Health care costs for preterm infants total \$26 billion per year.

“It’s extremely important for us to understand the risk factors associated with common pediatric health problems, including birth defects, diabetes, injuries, asthma, heart problems and a variety of others,” Hobbs said. “These have a tremendous impact on children, but they also go on to affect us in adulthood.”

Benton County, selected at random for participation based on birth statistics, is the only location in Arkansas chosen for the study. The Benton County study center will be expected to enroll 250 pregnant women for each of four years. The women will be followed before their babies are born and their infants will be studied for 30 months following delivery during this first phase of the study.

Investigators from ACHRI and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) will collaborate with Battelle Memorial Institute, a leading science, technology and health research institution, to contact and enroll women and to collect required information. The researchers will be working hand-in-hand with the Arkansas Department of Health, the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Benton County obstetricians and pediatricians and Benton County business leaders and community agencies to successfully complete study tasks. Dr. James Robbins, a professor in the Department of Pediatrics at UAMS, will work from the ACH/UAMS Centers for Children in Lowell as the director of local data collection.

“Many agencies will work together as an integrated team on this unprecedented study,” Hobbs said. “We will complement each other with our various strengths so that we can all learn more about the many biological and environmental factors that are at play from birth through the teen years and beyond.”

The research will require that each mother and infant participate in information collections through in-home visits, telephone calls, questionnaires and medical record abstractions. The investigators will collect environmental samples from homes, neighborhoods and communities. They also will take biological samples, including blood, urine, hair and meconium from the babies. Mothers also will be expected to provide biological samples. For their participation in this phase of the study, mothers will receive modest compensation for each of 10 in-person visits.

The study center will hire between 40 and 50 new personnel from the local Benton County labor force. The study center also will involve as many as 10 existing ACHRI staff members who will be based at the Little Rock facility. The ACHRI personnel who will be hired in Benton County will work from the Centers for Children in Lowell and from additional office space leased for the project.

The contract has been awarded to ACHRI for five years, with a chance of renewal afterwards. The national study will last at least through four additional five-year cycles.

This project has been funded in whole with federal funds from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, under Contract No. HHSN275200800026C.

Additional information about the National Children's Study is available at <http://www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov>.

Arkansas Children's Hospital is the only pediatric medical center in Arkansas and one of the largest in the United States serving children from birth to age 21. The campus spans 28 city blocks and houses 316 beds, a staff of approximately 500 physicians, 80 residents in pediatrics and pediatric specialties and more than 4,000 employees. The private, nonprofit healthcare facility boasts an internationally renowned reputation for medical breakthroughs and intensive treatments, unique surgical procedures and forward-thinking medical research - all dedicated to fulfilling our mission of enhancing, sustaining and restoring children's health and development. ACH recently ranked No. 76 on FORTUNE 100 Best Companies to Work For®. For more information, visit [www.archildren.org](http://www.archildren.org).

ACHRI provides a research environment on the ACH campus to meet the needs of the UAMS faculty. Research scientists at ACHRI conduct clinical, basic science, and health services research for the purpose of treating illnesses, preventing disease and improving the health of children everywhere.

UAMS is the state's only comprehensive academic health center, with five colleges, a graduate school, a medical center, six centers of excellence and a statewide network of regional centers. UAMS has about 2,652 students and 733 medical residents. Its centers of excellence include the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, the Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, the Myeloma Institute for Research and Therapy, the Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, the Psychiatric Research Institute and the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging. It is one of the state's largest public employers with more than 10,000 employees, including nearly 1,150 physicians who provide medical care to patients at UAMS, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and UAMS' Area Health Education Centers throughout the state. UAMS and its affiliates have an economic impact in Arkansas of \$5 billion a year. For more information, visit [www.uams.edu](http://www.uams.edu).

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