

The Birmingham 1000 Elders group

The Birmingham 1000 Elders Group was formed in the early 1980s by Professor Bernard Isaacs, the professor of Geriatric Medicine. Professor Isaacs recognised the importance of involving local people in research activity at the University of Birmingham and also realised that having a local group of people who would be willing to help with research that was relevant to older people was a valuable resource. Through adverts in the local media and talks to local community groups, healthy adults over the age of 65 were recruited to be members of the group. At its peak the group had over 3000 members.

Activities of the Birmingham 1000 Elders

Initially the Birmingham 1000 Elders were involved in research that used questionnaires to find out about all aspects of life as an older adult in the UK, looking at issues such as health, housing, social activity, pensions etc. More recently this has expanded to include involvement in medical research including research into heart disease, infections in old age and falls. The involvement of the group has been crucial to the research activity of Birmingham University and in particular to the work carried out relating to older adults.

Updating and expanding the Elders database

Professor Janet Lord works on the effects of ageing upon the immune system and has used members of the Elders group in her research over the last 10 years. She is setting up a new research institute at Birmingham University - the Centre for Healthy Ageing Research that will carry out research to learn how to maintain good health in old age. Involving older adults in the work of the Centre, as volunteers in research and members of focus groups advising the Centre, will be key to its success. As such Professor Lord has taken over the maintenance of the Birmingham 1000 Elders database. As the Elders group was set up over 25 years ago one of her first actions was to write to all members to determine if they still wished to be involved and were still in good health. As a result of this process it became clear that the number of healthy Birmingham 1000 Elders has reduced dramatically and the group needs to be revitalised with new members.

What does membership of the 1000 Elders group involve?

Any adult aged 65 or over who is in good health and would like to become a member of the 1000 Elders initially fills out a questionnaire that provides us with contact details, basic personal information (date of birth, gender, marital status) and lifestyle information (any medication taken regularly, whether they smoke etc). The details are kept on a database so that members can be contacted for help with research at the University. For most members they will not be contacted more than twice a year and often the research may involve only filling in a questionnaire. For other studies they may be asked if they would be willing to come to the University to help with a study and this could involve for example giving a blood sample. In every case the research will have been approved by an Ethics committee and the member will always be able to decline if they do not want to take part. In addition travel expenses to get to the University will always be paid. Members of the Birmingham 1000 Elders group will be provided with a newsletter once a year telling them of the research going on at the University and we also aim to have regular public information days so that members can hear at first hand the latest research findings and gain information on how to maintain good health in old age.

Data protection

The personal details of people who agree to become part of our Elders database will not be supplied to anyone other than researchers involved in appropriate studies at the University of Birmingham. All applications from researchers to access the database will have to be approved by the database co-ordinator and all studies will have ethics committee approval.

To join the Birmingham 1000 Elders Group please fill in the [application form \(/Documents/college-mds/centres/healthy-ageing/1000-elders-info-sheet.pdf\)](#) and return it to:

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If you would like more information on the Elders group please contact Professor Lord directly by telephone on 0121 414 4399 , or use the email address listed above.