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## University of Lethbridge welcomes new AIHS Research Chair in Rural Health and Well-being

Dr. Julia Brassolotto has always looked at health policy issues from an equity perspective. That point of view shaped her first research work in rural Alberta and set the stage for her new role as Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions (AIHS) Research Chair in Rural Health and Well-being at the University of Lethbridge.

Brassolotto officially began her role at the U of L on July 1, but has seemingly been pointed in this direction since beginning her PhD work at York University in 2009. The Ontario native earned her undergraduate degree at McMaster University, followed by master's and PhD studies at York.



At the onset of her PhD research, she accompanied her partner to Northern Alberta where he was a teacher in an elementary school. Seeing an opportunity to investigate health equity issues in a rural setting, it set her on a career path that ultimately brought her to the U of L.

Her work in the North, and subsequently in the bordering communities in Northern rural British Columbia, shaped her PhD thesis and gave her experiential insight to the issues rural populations face. These interests persisted during her postdoctoral fellowship in Ontario.

“Living in rural Alberta, I noticed the ways in which rurality was a distinct determinant of health and had effects on other matters of health and health care. The way I had been approaching health equity up until that point hadn’t sufficiently addressed geography or rural Canada, so that was something I really wanted to explore. I got a taste of the distinct strengths and challenges of rural Alberta,” she says. “So, when I applied for this position at the U of L, it ended up being a perfect fit and brought me back to Alberta.”

Faculty of Health Sciences Dean Dr. Chris Hosgood could not be more pleased. He sees Brassolotto’s skill set as an ideal match to the scope of the new Chair.

“We are delighted to welcome Julia as the Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions Research Chair in Rural Health and Well-being. Her expertise in rural health, particularly relating to policy, will be a tremendous asset to the University of Lethbridge and the province,” says Hosgood.

“Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions is pleased that Dr. Brassolotto is now at the University of Lethbridge, ensuring equity in health for rural Alberta,” says Dr. Pamela Valentine, AIHS CEO (interim) and Transition CEO for Alberta Innovates. “The work that she is embarking upon is critically important to improved care for older Albertans.”

The (AIHS) Research Chair in Rural Health and Well-being is designed to create a research program focusing on social determinants of health and a big picture approach to rural health care.

“Broadly, it’s about the intersections of formal and informal care for older adults,” says Brassolotto. “I’m particularly interested in older adults with dementia in rural Alberta, looking at how the boundaries between public and private care are organized differently in rural areas than they are in urban areas.”

Her work includes looking at the conditions of care work, both paid and unpaid, and how public policy and the allocation of resources affects health and health care in a rural setting.

“Sometimes policy decisions are made without really considering the demographics and capabilities of the affected communities,” she says. “I want to find the gaps in our knowledge about rural dementia care, build on existing knowledge, and design research for the next couple years so that the research reflects the needs of rural Albertans.”

She says there will be ample opportunity for students to participate in the research work, something she found very valuable throughout her studies.

“I really benefited from that during my grad studies and that was what allowed me to get the experience I needed to be eligible for this position,” she says. “My supervisor for my post-doc and PhD had a CIHR Chair in Gender, Work, and Health, and by being able to take part in her research program, I had the opportunity to get my hands dirty. I’d like to be able to pass along that type of experience to my students.”

Brassolotto’s position is funded for five years, with a two-year option for extension.

To view online: <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/u-l-introduces-dr-julia-brassolotto-new-aihs-research-chair-rural-health-and-well-being>

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