**New initiative for inclusive disaster preparedness, response and recovery**

**OTTAWA, October 11, 2013**  —  This year’s theme of the International Day for Disaster Reduction (October 13) is “Living with Disability and Disasters.” Numerous reports and studies have shown that the needs of people with a disability during natural disasters and disasters brought on by humans are often understated and misinterpreted. To address this gap, researchers from the University of Ottawa and community partners gathered under the umbrella of the [EnRiCH Project](http://www.enrichproject.ca/enrich.html) to develop an approach to promoting resilience as a disaster management strategy. The broader application of the strategy will be promoted through a major new initiative, the [EnRiCH Collaboration](http://www.enrichproject.ca/enrich-collaboration.html), which brings together over 60 academic, government and community partners in nine countries.

People living with a disability represent one-fifth of the world’s population. They have tremendous potential to contribute to initiatives targeted at reducing the risk of disasters and at building resilient communities. However, the contribution they could make is often overlooked. However, researchers at the University of Ottawa have now partnered with the Canadian Red Cross, Defence Research and Development Canada’s Centre for Security Science as well as government and community organizations across multiple jurisdictions. Together, they are focusing on building the capacity of communities, programs and businesses to implement disaster preparedness and response programs for and in collaboration with individuals with disabilities and other functional limitations.

“Our overarching goal is to demonstrate the fact that decisions and policies to reduce disaster risks must reflect the assets and needs of persons living with disabilities,” explains Tracey O’Sullivan, director of the EnRiCH Project and associate professor at the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Health Sciences. Professor O’Sullivan and her team developed a process for effectively collaborating on disaster preparedness, response and recovery through inclusive engagement using awhole-of-community approach.

“This approach, demonstrated in four pilot communities across Canada (Gatineau, Quebec City, Truro and the Region of Waterloo), endorsed a culture shift from viewing people with disabilities as ‘emergency management challenges’ to community assets and partners,” adds Professor O’Sullivan. “In other words, it exposed opportunities for individuals with functional limitations to take ownership of their own personal preparedness, fill leadership positions, pursue personal vocational opportunities and assist their community in its unique preparedness needs.”

In order to put this knowledge directly into the hands of those who need it most, the EnRiCH Collaboration initiative bringstogether various groups responsible for disaster management, first responder services at all levels and the groups most often involved in providing support to work with the organizations that represent those with functional limitations. This new international collaboration will provide a mechanism for identifying research needs and emerging issues by hearing from those directly involved.

**INFORMATION**

Kina Leclair
Media Relations Officer, University of Ottawa, kleclair@uOttawa.ca