

Texas study to examine Alzheimer's in Hispanics

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press Writer © 2009

The Associated Press

April 29, 2009, 12:51PM

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas researchers are starting a new project to study the impact of Alzheimer's disease on Hispanics.

The Texas Alzheimer's Research Consortium announced the study Wednesday, noting that Hispanics have high rates of diabetes and heart disease, two health concerns recently linked to the onset of Alzheimer's.

About 340,000 Texans live with Alzheimer's disease, according to the group.

"Hispanics are underrepresented nationally in Alzheimer's research and we have an opportunity in Texas to lead the country in this work," said Dr. Rachele Doody, a neurology professor at Baylor College of Medicine.

The Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, the University of North Texas Health Science Center, and the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, were already members of the research group, which announced the addition of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Texas lawmakers have been giving the group state money since 2005, including \$3.9 million in the current two-year budget. The group has already created a "bio-bank" of blood tissue data stored for future research as well as information on clinical, psychological and lab data on 800 volunteers recruited for Alzheimer's research.

On Wednesday, former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, whose husband suffers from Alzheimer's, spoke briefly to the state Senate.

"It takes a devastating toll not only on the individual who suffers from it, but on the family. It is a disease that affects every member of the family by virtue of the care that must be provided," O'Connor said.

"We need a focus in every state. We need a national focus on the disease." she said. "I congratulate Texas and the Legislature for what you've done so far."

The new Texas project researching Alzheimer's in Hispanics will recruit volunteers from a heart and aging study in San Antonio that first began in 1979.

Researchers already have historical data on that group's diabetes and cardiovascular risks, said Dr. Donald Royall, chief of aging and geriatric psychiatry at the San Antonio science center.