

## **Australian Evidence of a Literacy Gap in Lay Knowledge of Genetic Science and Related Concepts**

Caron Molster<sup>1</sup>, Taryn Charles<sup>1</sup>, Amanda Samanek<sup>1</sup> and Peter O'Leary<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

1. Office of Population Health Genomics, Health Policy and Clinical Reform Division, Department of Health, Perth, Western Australia.

2. School of Women's & Infants' Health, University of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia.

3. School of Public Health, Division of Health Sciences, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia.

This study collected data on lay knowledge of genetic issues such as risk of disease, inheritance, biology and genetic determinism, and identifies factors that predict relatively higher genetic knowledge within the general adult population. A cross sectional telephone survey of one thousand and nine respondents suggests that most members of the Western Australian community understand basic genetic concepts and the fact there is a link between genes, inheritance and risk of disease. Significantly fewer understand the biological mechanisms underlying these concepts. The relative odds of higher genetic knowledge were significantly greater among females, younger members of the public, those with higher socio-economic status as measured by education and household income and those who had talked with someone or searched the internet for information on genes and health. Providing evidence of a socially inequitable “genetic literacy” gap in public understanding of genetics and human health, further research is being undertaken to determine in the Australian context, whether this gap needs closing or whether current public understanding of genetics is sufficient to allow for effective community participation in decisions regarding human genetics and health.