

Estonia to map DNA of over 10% of population

May 21 2018



A depiction of the double helical structure of DNA. Its four coding units (A, T, C, G) are color-coded in pink, orange, purple and yellow. Credit: NHGRI

A trail-blazer in internet technology, cyber-savvy Estonia is rolling out a high-tech DNA database holding the genetic details of over 150,000 residents to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of chronic disease.

Researchers at the national Genome Centre want to map the genes of some 11.7 percent of the people of Estonia, a Baltic eurozone and NATO state of 1.3 million people.

Launched this year to mark the country's centenary, the five million euro (\$5.9 million) project also aims to issue genetic cards with personalised genotype analysis to 100,000 Estonian volunteers.

"The more genetic data we have, the greater our precision in scientific research and the faster we will be able to discover gene variants linked to disease," Genome Centre spokeswoman Annely Allik told AFP on Monday via email.

The database is intended to find and map genetic variations, and will build on existing genetic records for over 52,000 Estonians collected since the centre opened in 2001.

Volunteers can give their DNA samples in hospitals and the private laboratories of project partner Synlab, which is also setting up tents at sporting events for DNA donors.

Volunteers are warned that they will not be able to use their genetic records to trace their family tree as this would reveal third-party sensitive information like parentage.

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Citation: Estonia to map DNA of over 10% of population (2018, May 21) retrieved 23 April

2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-05-estonia-dna-population.html>

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