

6 May 2004

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL STEM CELL CENTRE SECURES ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Australia's National Stem Cell Centre (NSCC) today welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement of ongoing funding for the NSCC to pursue the research, development and commercialisation of regenerative medicine.

NSCC Chief Executive Officer, Dr Hugh Niall said the additional funding of \$55 million from the Australian Government for the period 2006-2011 greatly enhanced Australia's ability to develop treatments for serious diseases using stem cells and related technologies.

"The Australian Government's announcement demonstrates its continuing commitment to support Australia's position at the forefront of this pioneering field of medicine," Dr Niall said.

"The faith shown in Australia's world-leading expertise will strengthen the resolve of all associated with the NSCC to accelerate the delivery of therapeutics from stem cells and related technologies."

The renewed funding commitment follows funding in 2002 of \$43.55 million from the Australian Government and \$10 million from the Victorian Government to establish a Biotechnology Centre of Excellence. The objective of the NSCC as a Centre of Excellence is to support Australia's world class stem cell research and provide it with a commercial focus.

Dr Niall commended the Australian Government for its foresight and appreciation of the timelines associated with the delivery of therapeutic benefits in the biotechnology industry and its commitment to a long term vision of an Australian Biotechnology Centre of Excellence.

The NSCC has comprehensively reviewed its research projects to ensure that each is internationally competitive, relevant to patients and doctors, and complies with the highest ethical standards. "The NSCC has received tremendous support from our Stakeholders, which are seven of Australia's leading universities and research institutes. They have been instrumental in the development of a vibrant collaborative network of stem cell researchers." Dr Niall said.

"The NSCC seeks to provide life-saving treatments through its commercialisation activities. Capturing the value of the research through creation of intellectual property and development of therapeutic products will both help patients and benefit the Australian economy."

The Prime Minister's announcement was applauded by Professor Paul Simmons from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and Research Director of the adult stem cell program of the NSCC.

“The collaborative research programs established by the NSCC are not only exciting scientifically but provide an excellent opportunity to accelerate the delivery of treatment to patients,” Professor Simmons said.

The adult stem cell program will concentrate on treatments for blood and cardiac disease. In the long term the NSCC expects to create a safe and accessible blood supply which will be used to treat patients with diseases such as leukaemia.

The NSCC also intends to create cell based therapies which will repair damaged cardiac tissue. These therapies could be used to assist heart disease patients who currently have no access to treatment.

Associate Professor Martin Pera, the Research Director of the NSCC’s embryonic stem cell research program, said the funding commitment was significant for Australia’s scientific community.

“The recognition by the Australian Government of the importance of stem cell research and its enormous potential will greatly enhance Australia’s competitive edge in this area,” he said.

Media Inquiries

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NSCC Background

The National Stem Cell Centre is a major collaborative effort, uniting some of Australia’s leading researchers and scientists, with key nodes in four Australian states – Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia.

It was formed out of the ‘Backing Australia’s Ability’ initiative of the Commonwealth Government to establish a Biotechnology Centre of Excellence, and was awarded \$43.55 million in Commonwealth funding through the Australian Research Council and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources.

A further Commonwealth grant of \$5.5 million was awarded to the NSCC to establish a Major National Research Facility (MNRF) and a \$10 million supporting grant came from the Victorian Government under its Science, Technology and Innovation program. The Victorian Government provided an additional \$1.375 million in matching MNRF funding.