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Media Release

Strategy and Collaboration to Drive Australian Stem Cell Centre Research

Thursday 23 July 2009, Melbourne Australia:

The Australian Stem Cell Centre today announces funding for four collaborative research programs. These have been initiated as the centrepiece of the Centre's strategy to position stem cell research as a core discipline in Australia's biomedical research effort.

The Australian Stem Cell Centre (ASCC) is forging ahead with a new approach to supporting stem cell research which brings together the best Australian scientists. Today, the ASCC announces the expansion and reorganisation of its research portfolio into four large research programs known as 'Collaborative Streams'.

Representing excellence in Australian stem cell research, the Collaborative Streams are the centrepiece of a strategy that will guide the ASCC through the remainder of its current funding period (to June 2011) and beyond. The Centre's strategy also concentrates on facilitating the translation of research into economic benefit and public good, on the dissemination of stem cell technical expertise to build Australia's research capabilities in the field and on enhancing the public's understanding of stem cell science.

The four successful Collaborative Streams, which were selected by independent peer-review, consist of a number of research modules built around four main themes of stem cell research: embryonic stem cells, adult stem cells, induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS cells) and bioreactors for the propagation of stem cells. Each Stream is led by internationally-recognised stem cell scientists:

1. *Bioreactors and Smart Surfaces for Stem Cell Propagation*
Professor Peter Gray, Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology (AIBN), University of Queensland and Associate Professor David Haylock, Australian Stem Cell Centre
2. *Reprogramming and Induction of Pluripotency*
Associate Professor Ernst Wolvetang, AIBN, University of Queensland and Dr Andrew Laslett, Australian Stem Cell Centre
3. *Pluripotent Stem Cell Differentiation*
Professor Andrew Elefanty, Monash University and Associate Professor Susie Nilsson, Australian Stem Cell Centre
4. *Adult Stem Cells*
Professor Richard Harvey, Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute and Professor Melissa Little, Institute for Molecular Biology, University of Queensland

"Our hope is that stem cells will one day be used to ameliorate and cure a wide range of human diseases. While this goal will not be fully achieved for several years and will require answers to fundamental questions about the biology and metabolism of stem cells, we believe the Collaborative Streams are the best and most efficient vehicles to attack and solve these questions" said Professor Graham Macdonald, Chair of the Australian Stem Cell Centre. He added "The Collaborative Streams



involve a large proportion of Australia's stem cell research groups, providing an unprecedented opportunity to develop new collaborations. The research teams, which include scientists without a previous relationship to the Centre, will be able to call on the Centre's advanced technology services such as the provision of validated stem cell lines and training and support for junior scientists. This is an exciting development for the Centre which has been to a large extent driven by the stem cell scientific community. All of us involved with the ASCC look forward to seeing these collaborations produce significant results in the coming years and enhance our understanding of stem cells and their potential applications."

Professor Peter Gray, Director of the Australian Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology at the University of Queensland and a Collaborative Stream Leader added "the establishment of the Collaborative Streams will consolidate stem cell research in this country. By working together stem cell scientists will accelerate the translation of stem cells from the lab to the clinic."

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About the ASCC

The Australian Stem Cell Centre was founded to capitalise on Australia's significant strengths in the field of stem cell research. The ASCC was selected in 2002, in a competitive bid process, as Australia's Biotechnology Centre of Excellence, an initiative of the Australian Government. The Centre provides a unique national resource for stem cell researchers to deliver outcomes that benefit the wider Australian biotechnology industry and will ultimately contribute innovative solutions to human health challenges.

The Centre was established with the financial and in-kind support of a number of institutions of which the current voting Members, who retain ultimate oversight of the Centre, are: Monash University, University of Queensland, Howard Florey Institute and University of Adelaide. The additional Stakeholder institutes are: University of Melbourne, Baker IDI, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute and Mater Medical Research Institute.

The ASCC is governed by a Board of Directors with independent scientific oversight and support from an eminent Scientific Advisory Board.

Total funding of \$100 million has been awarded to the ASCC by the Australian Government and is administered by the Australian Research Council and the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. The funding is provided in instalments from 2002 to 2011. To complement Australian Government funding, the State Government of Victoria's Science Technology and Innovation program awarded the Australian Stem Cell Centre a further \$11 million to support key infrastructure in Victoria.

Together the ASCC and partnering organisations support a critical mass of Australian stem cell research that is internationally competitive. The ASCC currently funds research at leading institutes and universities in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales with the major hubs of activity centred in Victoria and Queensland.