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New funding scheme to boost cancer research

Cancer research in Australia will be boosted by a new scheme designed to improve coordination and maximise the value of individual groups' support for research.

The new Priority-driven Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme will provide up to \$10 million for priority research grants in 2007.

The founding partners are the Australian Government's new cancer agency, Cancer Australia, the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, and the Department of Health and Ageing. It is hoped that other cancer organisations that fund research will join the scheme in 2008.

Cancer Australia's CEO, Professor David Currow, said the scheme was important because it would fund projects that:

- focus on answering important research questions;
- increase consumer involvement in research;
- encourage researchers to work collaboratively;
- draw new researchers to cancer research; and
- have an impact on populations with poorer outcomes within the community, such as people in rural and regional areas or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"This is a new approach to funding cancer research – bringing together cancer charities and government funding to increase cancer research in priority areas," Professor Currow said.

"Each partner will fund research projects that aim to answer the questions they have identified as most likely to make a difference to cancer outcomes in this country."

Grants funded in the first round will support research related to common cancers affecting Australians (breast, prostate, bowel and ovarian cancers), as well as research aimed at improving early detection, treatment and care for people affected by other cancers.

By working together the funding organisations will improve coordination of research funding, reducing duplication and building collaborations between researchers working in related areas.

Every research dollar provided by the community-funded organisations goes directly to research, as Cancer Australia will fund the administrative and assessment processes. The National Health and Medical Research Council will manage registration and assessment of applications.

The Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme will be launched at 10am today at the Garvan Institute for Medical Research, Sydney. Details of the founding partners' priorities for 2007 and their comments on the new funding scheme are on the following page.

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Priority-driven Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme

Funding partners and their priorities for the first year (2007):

Cancer Australia

Cancer Australia will fund research in priority areas identified by the Australian Government:

- Improving screening programs to ensure that patients can be identified and treated appropriately, and ensuring that screening services are effective.
- Early detection of breast and ovarian cancers.
- The application of emerging new treatments and technologies, particularly for bowel and prostate cancer.
- Improvements in cancer outcomes through better coordination of care and multidisciplinary approach.

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National Breast Cancer Foundation

The National Breast Cancer Foundation will provide \$1.5 million per year over the next three years for research priorities that include young women and breast cancer and advanced breast cancer. NBCF CEO Sue Murray said the new scheme would encourage researchers to form new collaborations and strengthen existing ones.

“This scheme will ensure that every dollar donated by the Australian public to participating cancer organisations will be put to research, which means less wastage on administration costs or doubling up of research,” Ms Murray said. “The NBCF is committed to funding the best Australian research that will have the biggest impact on breast cancer prevention and treatment.” NBCF is Australia’s only independent, not-for-profit community organisation supporting and promoting high quality research into the prevention, detection and treatment of breast cancer. Since it was established in 1994, it has funded over 158 research projects, totalling \$27.4 million, resulting in significant discoveries.

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Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia

The Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia (PCFA) is the peak national body for prostate cancer in Australia. It is dedicated to providing support, information and advocacy to men and their families affected by prostate cancer; raising awareness; and funding research into the cause, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of prostate cancer.

PCFA CEO Andrew Giles said currently there was no dedicated prostate cancer research program in Australia able to provide the critical mass of research and clinical expertise that is required. “Through this scheme, PCFA funding will assist focused research into priority areas of unmet need, with the ultimate goal of improving patient outcomes,” he said.

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Department of Health and Ageing

The Department of Health and Ageing will fund radiation oncology research projects related to:

- Clinical research in radiation oncology with particular focus on health outcomes and cost effectiveness.
- Optimal use of workforce including role definitions and clinical practice guidelines.
- Defining and improving service delivery, communication and pathways for patient access to radiation therapy.
- Evaluation of new treatments and technologies such as the role of intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) and image-guided radiation therapy (IGRT) in treatment and the role of positron emission tomography (PET) in monitoring and diagnosis.

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