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MEDIA RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION TARGETS AUSTRALIA'S DEADLIEST & HIDDEN CANCERS

Australia's deadliest common cancer, pancreatic cancer, and ovarian cancer, the hidden cancer, are to be the focus of the country's contribution to the biggest ever international research effort to unlock the genetic secrets of cancer.

The Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, announced on 26 March in Brisbane that NHMRC will fund research into pancreatic and ovarian cancer to the tune of \$27.5 M over 5 years as its contribution to the International Cancer Genomics Consortium (ICGC). The consortium spans 24 countries, and is expected to deliver significant benefits in detecting, preventing and treating cancer.

Pancreatic cancer is Australia's fifth most lethal cancer and has the lowest survival rate, and ovarian cancer* is the 6th most common cause of cancer related death.

The ICGC is one of most ambitious biomedical research efforts since the Human Genome Project. For cancer to occur, individual cells in our body suffer genetic mutations that, usually many years later, result in cancers. This project will use cutting edge science, never before available, to work out what these initial/initiating events in cells are.

The Consortium will help to coordinate current and future large-scale projects to understand the genomic changes involved in cancer. This genomic information will accelerate efforts to develop better ways of diagnosing, treating and preventing many types of cancer.

A Brisbane-based team at the University of Queensland's Institute for Molecular Bioscience will partner with the Garvan Institute in Sydney and a Canadian team at the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research to work on pancreatic cancer.

The other cancer to be studied will be ovarian cancer which is difficult to detect in its early stages because the symptoms are vague and common. Seven out of ten women with ovarian cancer are diagnosed at an advanced stage when the cancer has spread and is difficult to treat.*

The Peter McCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne will be working in collaboration with the Institute of Molecular Bioscience on the ovarian cancer research.

Other partners in this research include the University of Queensland, NSW Cancer Council, Silicon Graphics, and Applied Biosystems, a division of Life Technologies Corporation. The Commonwealth's contribution of \$27.5 million has been instrumental in allowing the researchers to leverage this funding to reach a total over \$40 million.

Medical genomics is the next big challenge in health care over the coming decade as researchers try to identify individual genes that cause specific cancers, leading to innovative treatments. Understanding what causes cancer will bring us one step closer to better prevention and treatment of cancers.

WORKING TO BUILD A HEALTHY AUSTRALIA

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Countries in the ICGC will share information, allowing the comparison of different cancers. Australia will provide tissue samples and data to other countries participating in the ICGC. Countries include Canada, China, India, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States and some European nations.

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**AIHW Ovarian cancer in Australia: an overview, 2006,*

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