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MEDIA RELEASE

VICTORIA WINS $20.8 MILLION IN TOP MEDICAL RESEARCH GRANTS

Three leading health and medical research teams in Victoria will share $20.8 million in some of the Australian Government's most highly sought-after research grants.

The Victorian funds are part of more than $108 million in National Health and Medical Research Council 2010 Program Grants awarded to research teams across the country.

The five-year grants are sought after because they enable research teams to pursue the best research options in their field, knowing they have the time, funds and flexibility to respond to unexpected findings and opportunities.

Echoing NHMRC's slogan, 'working to build a healthy Australia', the grants reinforce the Australian Government's election health commitments of *Keeping People Well – Focus on Prevention*, *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Health*, *Fighting Cancer – Australia's Biggest Killer* and *Ageing – Meeting Challenges of the 21st Century*.

The Victorian 2010 Program Grant recipients are:

- Nobel Laureate Professor Peter Doherty at the University of Melbourne, who will receive $10.4m. His team will develop and evaluate vaccines that induce long-lasting 'killer' T-cell immunity to protect against both seasonal and pandemic influenza.

- Professor Henry Krum at Monash University, who will receive $5.4m. His team will investigate heart failure, identify patients at high risk, use novel drugs, devices and stem cell therapies for treatment, and focus on the effect of heart failure on kidneys and vice versa.

- Professor Andrew Sinclair at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, who will receive $5.0m. His team will seek to identify genes important in sex determination and discover how they contribute to sexual development disorders.

The NHMRC funding is an essential part of the Australian Government's plans to bolster health and medical research to improve the wellbeing of all Australians.

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The importance of the grants was emphasised by the Prime Minister's advance naming of one recipient, Professor Angel Lopez of the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science in Adelaide, as part of a major announcement on cancer research in January 2009.

All the grants were awarded through an open competitive process carried out according to the NHMRC Act, subjected to rigorous peer review and approved by NHMRC's Research Committee and Council.

More information on the grants can be found at NHMRC's website, www.nhmrc.gov.au.

Details of the successful Victorian projects are attached.

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NHMRC 2010 Program Grant recipients in Victoria

Professor Henry Krum, Monash University, $5.39m
Prevention and Treatment of Chronic Heart and Kidney Disease via Epidemiological, Pharmacological Device and Cell-based Approaches

Heart failure describes where the heart cannot pump adequately to meet the needs of the body. This condition has a high mortality despite recent advances in therapy, therefore there is an urgent need for new approaches to this condition. The present grant aims to:

1. identify patients at high risk for future development of this condition where early intervention with drugs may reduce or prevent the development of new heart failure
2. use novel drugs, devices and stem cell therapies to identify ways to better treat patients with existing disease
3. focus on the effect of heart failure on the kidney and vice versa via early diagnosis and treatment strategies.

Professor Andrew Sinclair, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, $5m
Disorders of Human Sexual Development

Disorders of sexual development (DSDs) are surprisingly common and often result in infertility, genital abnormalities, gender mis-assignment and long-term psychological trauma. In this Program we will pool our expertise in human molecular genetics, mouse developmental biology and protein chemistry to identify genes important for sex determination and development of the gonads, and discover how they contribute to DSD, in order to improve clinical care to patients with DSD.

Laureate Professor Peter Doherty, University of Melbourne, $10.4m
Understanding and Controlling Influenza

While current influenza vaccines blunt winter epidemics, they must be updated frequently to keep up with virus mutation and they do not protect against pandemics caused by new flu viruses (such as bird flu). This program will define how flu virus interacts with the immune system to generate immunity mediated particularly by ‘killer’ T cells. We will use this knowledge to develop and evaluate vaccines that induce long-lasting T-cell immunity that can protect against both seasonal and pandemic flu.

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