



Lemma Government pledges \$20 million to new life-saving medical research institute

June 25, 2008

Premier Morris Lemma today announced the **NSW Government would provide \$20 million** towards the establishment of a **\$120 million state-of-the-art national HIV research centre in Sydney**.

Mr Lemma said the funding would help establish the **National Institute for Virology** which would bring **300 of the nation's top scientists** working on HIV/AIDS research **under the one roof**.

"NSW researchers are at the forefront of work in HIV treatment, prevention and vaccination," Mr Lemma said.

"This work is vital to the global effort to fight this terrible disease, with **45 million people living with HIV worldwide** and 16,000 new infections every day.

"Currently 150 researchers are working around the State as part of the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (NCHECR), under the leadership of Professor David Cooper.

"This investment will expand the international role of our State's researchers in both the prevention of HIV and their role in emerging public health issues, such as prevention of Hepatitis C.

"This new purpose-built facility will allow the expansion of the number of researchers and will consolidate the world-class research capacity of NCHECR in HIV research and medicine."

Mr Lemma said the National Institute of Virology would be located at **St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst Precinct**.

UNSW Chancellor David Gonski said: "The NSW government should be commended on its far-sightedness in making this significant investment in such a crucial area.

"It demonstrates, I believe, the Government's commitment to advancing excellence in medical research in this State."

Minister for Science and Medical Research Verity Firth said the facility would combine academic and clinical skills.

"The aim is for researchers and doctors to work together to take new knowledge from our labs to hospital bed-sides and into communities affected by HIV," Ms Firth said.

"It will attract high calibre researchers and provide an environment that nurtures and supports the training of new scientists in HIV research.

“This will have great flow on benefits for patient care in the public health system.”

Mr Lemma said **NSW HIV rates had remained stable over the past decade with 404 new notifications of HIV in NSW in 2007**, down slightly from 424 cases in 1997.

“These figures confirm that NSW has avoided the big rises seen in most states over the last decade,” Mr Lemma said.

“But we cannot afford to be complacent – one case of this disease is too many.

“This centre of excellence will mean that NSW researchers continue to lead the national and international effort to stem the spread of this terrible disease.”

The work of the NCHECR has been recognised as world leading among the scientific community, demonstrated by the awarding of a major NHMRC research grant of \$17.7 million for 2009.

UNSW’s Vice Chancellor Professor Fred Hilmer said: “This is a far reaching initiative which will have immediate benefits to NSW both in terms of the quality of care and the expansion of an important world class research base.

“In addition, the initiative is also important nationally and internationally in finding more effective ways to combat HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

“This project is a wonderful example of what can be achieved with the support of governments, foundations, the University and the Hospital.”

Professor David Cooper, who will head the new Institute said HIV affects everything from immunology, virology and clinical medicine, to human behaviour, social policy and economics.

“NCHECR now predicts an increase in HIV diagnoses in Australia after a steady decline from 1985-1996 with the 2007 figure being a 65 per cent increase from what was apparent in 1996.

“This increase varies greatly across our states and it illustrates quite clearly that this is a community issue requiring a combined medical, research and community response.

“This new facility will provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure these objectives are met.

“The purpose-built Institute will combine clinical and laboratory research in one location, opening up opportunities for an open exchange of ideas.

“Working together with St Vincents Hospital in one organisation will make it easier to attract research funding to further extend our capabilities.”

The Commonwealth has also been asked for matching funding, with the aim of the \$120 million development being funded one-third by Government, with the balance provided by philanthropy and UNSW on land provided by the Sisters of Charity. To this end, there has been a serious long-standing interest from a major international foundation to contribute a further \$20 million to the project.