New grants awarded to leading NSW diabetes researchers

NSW Minister for Health and Minister for Medical Research the Hon Jillian Skinner awarded 14 researchers with new Diabetes Australia grants at an event today in the NSW Parliament House.

Forty-six research projects were granted funding nationally for 2014 totalling $3.5 million. The Diabetes Australia Research Program has provided over $20m in research funding coming from charitable and philanthropic donors across Australia over past seven years.

Mrs Skinner says that research into finding a cure for diabetes and preventing diabetes and its complications is crucial.

1.7 million Australians have diabetes and yet there is still no cure for type 1 or type 2 diabetes. Diabetes is a serious condition that can cause heart attacks, strokes, blindness, amputations and kidney failure.

Mrs Skinner said the Federal Government has shown commitment to reducing the impact of diabetes by developing a new national strategy, led by an expert advisory group that is co-chaired by Diabetes Australia President, Hon Judi Moylan.

"The National Diabetes Strategy will strengthen Australia's response to the key areas of prevention and the primary health care sector, and will assist in identifying ways that will curb the impact of the condition through early diagnosis and treatment," said Mrs Skinner.

"Research to create a future without diabetes and its complications is essential," said Judi Moylan. “It has been more than 70 years since lifesaving insulin was discovered, however we still don’t know the actual causes of type 1 or type 2 diabetes nor how diabetes causes serious health complications and how to prevent it."

“Last year the National Health and Medical Research Council provided $44 million for diabetes research but this was dwarfed by $197 million for cancer and cardiovascular research. This is despite diabetes being the fastest growing epidemic and a major cause of hospitalisations, cost and lost productivity,” she said.

The new Diabetes Australia funded research is broad ranging and includes looking at inflammation and its role in causing both kidney damage and cardiovascular complications; transplanting human liver cells to reverse diabetes; very low energy (calorie) diets and their place in type 2 diabetes; and better programs for disadvantaged people to prevent complications and early mortality.

Prominent researcher Dr Paul Lee from the Garvan Institute of Medical Research is researching whether increasing or activating brown fat can help prevent or treat type 2 diabetes.

"Understanding how brown fat utilises energy, particularly sugar, may help us devise ways to improve energy balance in the body through brown fat. Our research will look at whether diet, exercise or medications for diabetes work through brown fat, or whether brown fat may be a completely new target exploitable in therapeutic development," Dr Lee said.

Diabetes Australia CEO Prof Greg Johnson said that the generosity of Australians has made it possible support vital diabetes research. "We hope more Australians, more companies and more philanthropists will join with us to support targeted and important diabetes research to help create a future where Australians do not face the threat of diabetes or its complications.”

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About the Diabetes Australia Research Program

Diabetes Australia supports and develops diabetes research in Australia through providing funding towards the prevention, management and cure of diabetes, as well as enabling and fostering young and upcoming researchers in diabetes research.

Support the Diabetes Australia Research Program

Diabetes Australia’s Research Program relies on the generosity and support of Australians, our member organisations, of trusts and foundations, and philanthropic donations. Any individual or organisation can support the Diabetes Australia Research Program. To start a regular donation, or find out more, call 02 6232 3800 or email research@diabetesaustralia.com.au

Project scope - Brown fat as a diabetes and obesity treatment target by Dr Paul Lee, Garvan Institute of Medical Research

Brown fat is a unique organ that burns fat and sugar to release energy as heat. Increased brown fat abundance protects animals from diabetes and other obesity-related disorders. Recent re-discovery of a high prevalence of brown fat in lean adults indicates it may also benefit metabolism in humans. This is underscored by findings of lower blood sugar levels and body fat among individuals with greater brown fat abundance. This research supported by the Diabetes Australia will investigate whether brown fat activation improves sugar homeostasis and explore underlying hormonal mechanisms. Results from these studies will provide insight on whether harnessing brown fat will benefit diabetes and weight control in humans.

FOR INTERVIEW:

NSW Minister for Health and Minister for Medical Research the Hon Jillian Skinner MP

Judi Moylan, President of Diabetes Australia

Prof Greg Johnson, CEO of Diabetes Australia

Dr Paul Lee, researcher

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