

MEDIA RELEASE

Major collaboration awarded \$5 million to support the detection of infectious diseases in the Indo-Pacific region

A consortium of Australia's leading infectious disease research centres - the Kirby, Doherty, and Burnet Institutes – together with international collaborators, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) and FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics - will strengthen laboratory capacity for testing and diagnosis of COVID-19, HIV, malaria and tuberculosis in our region.

(SYDNEY, CANBERRA, MELBOURNE, GENEVA: Monday 2 August 2021) The \$5,204,667 in funding for this collaboration is part of Australia's \$242 million commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The focus of this work was developed in partnership between Australia and the Global Fund, and will maximise the impact of related Global Fund investments.

“With COVID-19 cases rising in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, there have been growing concerns about how the increased pressure on health systems will impact existing programs to eliminate malaria, tuberculosis and HIV,” says Professor Anthony Kelleher, Director of the Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney.

“This investment from the Australian Government will allow us to work with our partners in Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Laos PDR to enhance local laboratory capacity which is essential for the accurate diagnosis of these infectious diseases, and which is stretched by the heightened challenges brought on by COVID-19.”

Professor Deborah Williamson from the Doherty Institute said it was essential to move quickly. “Infectious diseases require a constant foot on the pedal. Lifting it even slightly is enough to see rapid resurgence of diseases that we have been working hard to bring under control. This is a critical time for the management of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV in many countries of our region, and this investment from the Australian Government will help ensure crucial gains achieved are not lost while at the same time enhancing testing capacity for COVID-19.”

Rising cases of COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea have highlighted regional health security concerns when infectious diseases are not contained in our neighbouring countries.

“The grant is designed to improve impact of Global Fund's work in our region through lab strengthening of countries to carry out the critical task of testing and diagnosis,” says Australia's Ambassador for Regional Health Security, Dr Stephanie Williams. “It will also continue to strengthen technical partnerships between experts in Australia's world-class institutions and their regional counterparts.”

In recent years there has been many technological developments in testing for infectious diseases. Tests are now more accurate, can be conducted and analysed more easily, and are performed at the local level. This collaboration will investigate how best to integrate these technologies into existing health systems and in resource poor settings.

Stakeholder quotes

- **Professor William Pomat** from the PNG Institute of Medical Research welcomes the announcement. “We have a longstanding partnership with the Kirby Institute, and have achieved many important health outcomes through our collaborative efforts. This new collaboration will help set PNG on the best possible path to improve the detection of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria in our country, as well as improve our capability to do COVID-19 testing. An added benefit of this collaboration is that it will bring together the expertise of other leading research centres, as well as the experiences of other countries in our region, so we can each learn from each other’s experiences.”
- **Professor John Kaldor**, a leader in global health from the Kirby Institute emphasised that a program of this kind needed to be responsive to local need, saying “We will work closely with our partner countries to identify their gaps in diagnostic capacity, and how we can best work to address them”.
- **Ms Liza Doyle**, International Training and Development Manager at the Kirby Institute and lead on this project says that infectious disease research institutions have a key role to play in global development. “Our expertise has greatest impact when it is translated on the ground to strengthen disease detection and improve health outcomes.” This award is part of a growing number of capacity building projects and development collaborations led by the Kirby Institute.”
- Infectious Diseases Specialist **Dr Philipp Du Cros** from the Burnet Institute said “COVID-19 has challenged every country's health system. There is the risk of reduced services and reversal of recent gains in HIV, TB and malaria programs. This investment is a much-needed opportunity to support improved diagnostic capacity and experience sharing within the region.”

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About the Kirby Institute

The Kirby Institute is a world-leading health research organisation at UNSW Sydney working to eliminate infectious diseases, globally. We put communities at the heart of our research. That way, we are better able to design tests, treatments and cures that have the greatest chance of success, helping us to eliminate infectious diseases globally.

kirby.unsw.edu.au, www.facebook.com/TheKirbyInstitute, twitter.com/KirbyInstitute

About the Doherty Institute

Finding solutions to prevent, treat and cure infectious diseases and understanding the complexities of the immune system requires innovative approaches and concentrated effort. This is why The University of Melbourne – a world leader in education, teaching and research excellence – and The Royal Melbourne Hospital – an internationally renowned institution providing outstanding care, treatment and medical research – have partnered to create the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity (Doherty Institute); a centre of excellence where leading scientists and clinicians collaborate to improve human health globally.

doherty.edu.au, facebook.com/DohertyInstitute, twitter.com/TheDohertyInst

About Burnet Institute

Burnet Institute is an Australian, unaligned, not-for-profit, independent organisation that links medical research with practical action to help solve devastating health problems. Our mission is to achieve better health for vulnerable communities in Australia and internationally by accelerating the translation of research, discovery and evidence into sustainable health solutions.

About FIND

FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics, seeks to ensure equitable access to reliable diagnosis around the world. We connect countries and communities, funders, decision-makers, healthcare providers and developers to spur diagnostic innovation and make testing an integral part of sustainable, resilient health systems. We are working to save 1 million lives through accessible, quality diagnosis, and save US\$1 billion in healthcare costs to patients and health systems. We are co-convenor of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator diagnostics pillar, and a WHO Collaborating Centre for Laboratory Strengthening and Diagnostic Technology Evaluation. For more information, please visit www.finddx.org

About Clinton Health Access Initiative

The Clinton Health Access Initiative, Inc. (CHAI) is a global health organization committed to saving lives and reducing the burden of disease in low-and middle-income countries. We work with our partners to strengthen the capabilities of governments and the private sector to create and sustain high-quality health systems that can succeed without our assistance.

clintonhealthaccess.org