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News Release

Government of Canada announces funding for research to further protect Canadians from the H1N1 flu virus

For immediate release

(June 5, 2009) – The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of Health, is pleased to announce another step to protect Canadians from the spread of the H1N1 flu virus. The Government of Canada will fund a national influenza research network focused on pandemic vaccine evaluation. The network will strengthen Canada’s capacity to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of a pandemic influenza vaccine and vaccination programs.

The network was created through a partnership between the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). It will be led by Dr. Scott Halperin, Director of the Canadian Centre for Vaccinology in Halifax. It will link over 80 scientists from 30 research and public health institutions across Canada. The network will be supported with funding of \$10.8 million over three years.

“The Government of Canada identified the need for additional research capacity following the SARS crisis, and that’s why we committed funding for research in Budget 2006,” says Minister Aglukkaq. “We have put this research network in place ahead of schedule to help us respond to the current flu outbreak. Through this network, scientists from across the country will play a critical role in helping to protect the health of Canadians and their families.”

The network will provide a pan-Canadian coordinating mechanism for conducting applied public health research that will help governments and the public health community prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic. Network scientists will:

- test methodologies for the performance of rapid clinical trials
- assess the safety and immunogenicity of a novel pandemic influenza vaccine
- provide population-based estimates of vaccine safety and effectiveness
- measure vaccine coverage
- facilitate the rapid implementation of pandemic influenza vaccine programs

“Canada is fortunate to have a strong community of internationally-recognized infectious disease researchers,” says Dr. Alain Beaudet, President of CIHR. “Through the leadership of Dr. Bhagirath Singh, Scientific Director of CIHR’s Institute of Infection and Immunity, and in close collaboration with PHAC, CIHR has moved swiftly to mobilize this group of highly dedicated researchers to respond to the current flu outbreak. This is exactly what we did in response to the SARS crisis a few years ago. Our experience has shown us that this new Influenza Research Network will be a valuable resource to these researchers and to the public health community across Canada.”

Canada

"This flu network speaks to the very core of the Public Health Agency of Canada's mandate to protect Canadian from the threat of emerging diseases," says Dr. David Butler Jones, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, "Supporting this initiative in partnership with CIHR gives us all an ideal mechanism to learn more about influenza in Canada and how to improve our responses to current and future outbreaks."

"Networking benefits everyone - the researchers, the funding agencies and the public," says Dr. Halperin. "This grant allows us to establish formal connections and infrastructure for optimizing research, and increases our readiness for an influenza pandemic."

Minister Aglukkaq also announced funding to support the work of two national pandemic outbreak research teams:

- **Dr. Guy Boivin** at Université Laval and his team will work with a national team to track the evolution of the H1N1 flu virus, evaluate its susceptibility to antiviral drugs, and identify new potential therapeutic compounds to combat viral resistance.
- **Dr. Babak Pourbohloul** at the University of British Columbia and his team will work with the Canadian Consortium for Pandemic Preparedness Modelling to create mathematical models to rapidly analyze the transmission and spread of the influenza virus.

The work of these teams will help public health officials across Canada in their efforts to plan, design and evaluate interventions to control the spread of the virus and protect the health of Canadians. These teams are funded through CIHR's pandemic preparedness strategic research initiative, and they were pre-selected through a competitive, peer-review process conducted by CIHR.

The [Canadian Institutes of Health Research \(CIHR\)](http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca) is the Government of Canada's agency for health research. CIHR's mission is to create new scientific knowledge and to enable its translation into improved health, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened Canadian health-care system. Composed of 13 Institutes, CIHR provides leadership and support to nearly 13,000 health researchers and trainees across Canada. www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca

The [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca) is the main Government of Canada agency responsible for public health in Canada. PHAC's primary goal is to strengthen Canada's capacity to protect and improve the health of Canadians and to help reduce pressures on the health-care system. www.phac-aspc.gc.ca

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