

AllerGen NCE Receives \$36.5 million for Allergy, Genes and Environment Research to 2019

Press Release – 23 March 2012



On Friday, March 23, 2012, during an announcement ceremony held at McMaster University, the Honourable Gary Goodyear, Minister of State for Science and Technology announced Industry Canada support in the amount of \$36.5 million for AllerGen NCE Inc. to 2019.

“The Government of Canada is committed to improving the lives of all Canadians. While we believe that prevention and health care promotion will help keep health costs down and improve our quality of life, we also understand that investing in science and

technology will not only achieve these objectives, but will also contribute to economic growth” said the Minister.

The Minister went on to say that “AllerGen’s research will help improve the lives of millions of Canadians suffering from the complications of allergic diseases through innovation.”

This funding will keep AllerGen working towards its goals of discovering the causes of allergies and asthma, finding new treatments and diagnoses, and improving education, disease management and public policy, which all contribute to a better quality of life for people living with allergies, asthma and immune-related diseases. The research generated by the Network is reaching into the homes, schools and workplaces of millions of Canadians.

Between 2005 and 2011, AllerGen invested in allergy, asthma and anaphylaxis research in three intersecting, priority areas: Gene-Environment Interactions; Diagnostics and Therapeutics; and, Public Health, Ethics, Policy and Society. AllerGen leveraged the initial NCE investment of \$36M to generate an additional \$48 million in partner support, using this unique, made-in-Canada network structure to collaborate with stakeholders across multiple jurisdictions.

During his announcement remarks, Dr. Judah Denburg, Scientific Director and CEO of AllerGen stated that “over the next seven years, AllerGen aims to focus on commercialization and knowledge mobilization activities arising from three Legacy Projects — The Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) Study; the Clinical Investigator Collaborative (CIC); the Canadian Food Allergy Strategic Team (CanFAST); and three Enabling Platforms — Gene-Environment Interactions; Biomarkers & Bioinformatics; and, Patients, Policy and Public Health. Working across disciplines and sectors, AllerGen research teams will break new ground in



understanding the causes of allergy, asthma and anaphylaxis and environmental factors that influence these diseases, improve diagnosis, treatment, prevention. AllerGen's research and development efforts will also create new "high value" jobs, prepare the next generation of researchers, entrepreneurs and experts to fill them, and leave international legacies of socio-economic benefits and improved quality of life for individuals and their families living with allergies, asthma and anaphylaxis."

The first legacy project is led by Dr. Malcolm Sears, Professor, Department of Medicine at McMaster University who said "the CHILD Study is and will continue collecting data creating the most comprehensive immunological, psycho-social, geographical, genetic and environmental profiles of Canadian babies and which will help reveal root causes of asthma and other allergic diseases."

The second legacy project is AllerGen's national, multi-centred clinical trials consortium that has international reach and is led by Dr. Paul O'Byrne, Professor, Department of Medicine at McMaster University. Dr. O'Byrne who stated that "the CIC has placed Canada at the forefront of related diagnostics and therapeutics, leading the discovery, development and commercialization of new tests and treatments."

Another area of focus moving forward is "food allergy and anaphylaxis management and it's an important area of research for AllerGen" said Dr. Jean Marshall, Professor and Head of Microbiology and Immunology at Dalhousie University. She added that AllerGen and the team "anticipate having conclusive data on food allergy prevalence in Canada, novel diagnostics and therapeutics as well as work with many partners on developing a national food allergy strategy benefiting patients, health professionals, food manufacturers and consumers."

AllerGen has many strong partnerships, one of them being with Environment Canada. Dr. Jeff Brook, Senior Scientist, Air Quality Research Branch for Environment Canada said that "with a diverse climate and broad base of expertise Canada is an ideal country in which to conduct allergic disease research. AllerGen's proposed research program moving forward and collaborations with Health Canada will make it possible to study to what extent and how environmental risk factors interact with genetic factors to increase or decrease burden of illness, health costs and productivity as well as Gene-Environment Interactions." This research will involve well-established teams of AllerGen investigators working nationally and globally to apply genetic and environmental research innovation and new knowledge on nature and nurture.

"Current policies in schools, the workplace and within the food processing and packaging industry do not reflect best practices suggested by emerging research" said Dr. Susan Elliott, Professor and Dean, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo. Another Enabling Platform-Patients, Policy and Public Health-supporting the three legacy projects will allow "AllerGen research to benefit all Canadians as a result of new public policies, updated regulatory frameworks, education and prevention strategies and more accessible practice guidelines," added Dr. Elliott.

The AllerGen NCE Network is made up of 200 researchers at 23 universities and institutions across Canada. Over the last seven years, AllerGen provided an enriched learning environment for over 700 trainees and highly qualified personnel, many of whom represent the next

generation of academic, government and industry leaders. Network researchers have worked with over 350 partner organizations and published over 1100 papers to date.



Patrick Deane, McMaster's President and Vice-Chancellor, said it's an honour to be the host institution of AllerGen — a network which shares McMaster's philosophy on research. "We're aligned in our thinking and approach to research through innovation and multidisciplinary collaborations," he said. "The blend of talent and expertise within AllerGen is second to none and their collective work will improve the health and well-being of many Canadians."

In 2004, AllerGen was selected for funding through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) program and was renewed in 2012 following a rigorous review process.

The NCE program is managed jointly by the three federal granting agencies—the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)—in partnership with Industry Canada.