

Australian Centre for Hepatitis and HIV Virology (ACH²)

Scientific Advisory Committee

Report of the Meeting to Review Expressions of Interest for Funding, 2007-2008 (16th October 2006)

The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of the Australian Centre for Hepatitis and HIV Virology (ACH²) met on the 16th October 2006 to consider 75 Expressions of Interest for ACH² funding from January 2007 for one and up to two years. It was noted that two year funding requests would take the Centre beyond the current funding arrangement, and that as a result funding commitments for only the first year were made. Funding beyond 2007 will be confirmed when the 2008 budget is finalised.

In assessing the applications, the SAC were mindful of the need for consistency with the Strategic Plan of the Centre. Proposals deemed eligible were those presenting:

- Research directly aimed at developing new antiviral drug strategies or new vaccine candidates
- Research aimed at developing new diagnostics, prognostics, or tools for tracking the epidemic or for measuring antiviral resistance or toxicity
- Development of novel tests to support clinical trials in HIV or hepatitis C

Whilst the call for Expressions of Interest had, in anticipation of an agreement for additional funding from the Department of Health, extended the list of infectious agents that might be considered for funding to include “chlamydia, herpes simplex virus, papillomavirus and hepatitis B”, the agreement did not eventuate. The SAC noted that the advertisement had stated “the component for viral STI’s is subject to funding by the Commonwealth Department of Health”. It also noted that the Executive had indicated that applications for study of these agents in co-infection with HIV or hepatitis C could be considered, but applications studying those entities as primary aetiological agents should be deemed ineligible.

We ranked applications with the following categories:

- A: Excellent, and must be funded
- B1: Very Good, should be funded
- B2: Good, could be funded
- C: Funding not recommended

We also used the category:

- D: Application deemed ineligible for funding because it did not address a priority in the strategic plan.

Such applications were those deemed exclusively biomedical research or with the likely development of drug targets, vaccine candidates or diagnostics/ prognostics being far distant. In addition, applications not dealing with HIV or hepatitis C were ineligible.

In one instance a Panel member (Professor Colman) identified the potential for a conflict of interest to arise in the discussion of the application “Structure function analysis of multi-surface dendrimer based microbicides” (SL Wesselingh), and he was therefore absent when that application was considered.

Immunovirology Research Network (IVRN) Applications

Of the 75 applications, 9 were identified as potentially fundable through the IVRN, and were assessed by a special IVRN working group. The SAC included 6 of the 9 in their ranking exercise.

Summary of Funding Recommendations

In summary, we recommend 22 of the 75 Expressions of Interest (29%) for funding, with a total commitment of \$1.971M from the EOI budget in 2007 (average grant \$94K) and a commitment of \$70K from the IVRN budget. Total funding committed is therefore \$2.041M.

For the majority of funded applications, the SAC recommended grants at the level of funding requested by the applicants. For the remainder, the SAC agreed that the proposed work remained highly competitive and achievable at the reduced funding level.

The attached tables provide an analysis of the distribution of funding, and include consideration of all 22 recommended grants. A detailed spreadsheet documenting the recommendations concerning each application is also attached.

Scientific Advisory Committee:

Professor Peter Colman
Mr John Daye¹
Professor John Finlay-Jones (Chair)
Professor David Gordon
Professor Ian Gust (apology for 16.10.06)
Mr Paul Harvey²
Professor Denis Moss
Associate Professor Darren Shafren
Professor Geoff Shellam

¹*Consumer and Community Representative: HIV*

²*Consumer and Community Representative: HCV*

7th December 2006

Table 1: Categorisation and Ratings of Applications

Rating	Category	Outcomes	Aggregated
A	Excellent - fund	2 (3%)	} Fund 22/75 (29%)
B1	Very Good – fund	18 (24%)	}↑
	IVRN B1	2 (3%)	}↑
B2	Good – fund if possible	30 (40%)	Fundable 30/75 (40%)
C	Funding not recommended	4 (5%)	}↓
D	Ineligible – do not fund	19 (25%)	Not recommended 23/75 (31%)

Table 2: Success Rates of Applications by Category

Category*	HIV	HCV	Combined
Antiviral Targets	8/23 (35%)	1/4 (25%)	9/27 (33%)
Vaccines	2/5 (40%)	3/10 (30%)	5/15 (33%)
Diagnostics/ prognostics; tools for tracking epidemic; measuring antiviral resistance or toxicity	6/24 (25%)	2/9 (22%)**	8/33 (24%)**
Novel tests for clinical trials	0/0	0/0	-
Totals	16/52 (31%)	6/23 (26%)	22/75 (29%)

*Note: only primary category shown

** includes 2 IVRN grants

Table 3: Success Rates by Institution (Listed in Order of Total Grant Amount)

Institution*	Success rate	Amount Awarded (2007)	Average Grant (2007)
Macfarlane Burnet Institute (Vic)	11/27 (41%)	\$1,021K (50%)	\$93K
University of Melbourne (Vic)	3/9 (33%)	\$311K (15%)	\$104K
W'mead Millennium Inst (NSW)	3/8 (38%)	\$294K (14%)	\$98K
QIMR (Qld)	1/5 (20%)	\$118K (6%)	\$118K
Royal Perth Hospital (WA)	1/1 (100%)	\$80K (4%)	\$80K
St George Hospital (NSW)**	1/2 (50%)	\$74K (4%)	\$74K
IMVS (SA)	1/3 (33%)	\$73K (4%)	\$73K
Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (NSW)**	1/1 (100%)	\$70K (3%)	\$70K
Vic Inf Dis Ref Lab (Vic)	0/4 (0%)	-	-
Monash University (Vic)	0/4 (0%)	-	-
UNSW (NSW)	0/3 (0%)	-	-
Nat Serol Ref Lab (Vic)	0/2 (0%)	-	-
ANU (ACT)	0/2 (0%)	-	-
Other (1 application per Institution) Prince of Wales Hospital (NSW) St Vincent's Hospital (NSW) Inst Molec Bioscience/ UQ (Qld) Flinders University (SA)	0/4 (0%)	-	-
TOTAL	22/75 (29%)	\$2.041M (100%)	\$93K

*Note: only primary/administering institution shown

** IVRN grant

Table 4: Success Rates by State/ Territory (Listed in Order of Share of Funding)

State/ Territory*	Success rate	Share of Funding	% of applications
Victoria	14/46 (30%)	\$1,332K (65%)	61%
NSW**	5/16 (31%)	\$438K (21%)	21%
Queensland	1/6 (17%)	\$118K (6%)	8%
WA	1/1 (100%)	\$80K (4%)	1%
SA	1/4 (25%)	\$73K (4%)	5%
ACT	0/2 (0%)	-	3%
NT, Tas	0/0 (-)	-	-

*Note: multi-state/territory applications listed under state/territory of primary/administering institution only

** Includes 2 IVRN grants