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MEDIA STATEMENT

WA LEADS WORLD-FIRST BID TO CRACK DIABETES CODE

Three thousand Australian families with children affected by diabetes are being asked to join a nationwide effort to set up a DNA database that could help prevent the chronic condition.

The creation of the Australian Childhood Diabetes DNA Repository is being funded by a \$1.78 million dollar grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council, with additional support from the Diabetes Research Foundation and the University of Western Australia.

The project will be led by world-renowned diabetes expert Professor Grant Morahan, head of the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research's (WAIMR) Diabetes Research Centre.

Professor Morahan said with the incidence of both Type 1 diabetes and Type 2 diabetes increasing sharply in Australian children, the resource was critically important.

"More and more children are being diagnosed with both forms of this chronic disease, and what is perhaps most alarming is that the obesity-related Type 2 diabetes, which was unheard of in children just a decade ago, is now rising at a rate of 28 per cent a year," he said.

"These conditions put immense pressure on a person's own health and wellbeing, and also on the nation's health system, so we believe it's a priority to move now to tackle the problem before it spirals out of control."

Professor Morahan said while researchers were making headway into cracking the genetic codes of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, the exact causes of the conditions remained unknown.

He expected this project would help speed up the search.

"Being able to look at the genetic makeup of a large number of Australian children, as well as their parents, has been the missing link in being able to fast-track the process of determining what genes are related to diabetes," he said.

"This project has the capacity to redress that gap, and we believe investigation of the genetics of childhood-onset Type 2 diabetes to be a world-first initiative with the potential to help create new diagnostic tests and treatments, and take us a step closer to preventing diabetes."

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Other organisations involved in the Repository's establishment are Perth's Telethon Institute for Child Health, Princess Margaret Hospital, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital, Westmead Children's Hospital in New South Wales and Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane.

To find out how to join the project, contact Ms Niru Ratnam at Princess Margaret Hospital on (08) 9340 8671 or Ms Sherl Westlund of the Diabetes Research Foundation (08) 9224 1006.

DIABETES FAST FACTS

- Diabetes has been endorsed by all State and Territory ministers and the NHMRC as the fifth national health priority area.
- Across Australia, more than one million people have diabetes and it is the sixth leading cause of death in the country.
- Type 2 diabetes is the most prevalent form of diabetes and accounts for approximately 90% of diabetes in Australia.
- A WA study has revealed, on average, a 27 per cent annual rise in the number of WA children being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.
- There is no cure for type 1 diabetes. Also sometimes known as juvenile diabetes, it is treated with daily injections of insulin.
- Over 120,000 Australians have type 1 diabetes and the number is on the rise, with research revealing the incidence of the disease is increasing by about 3% a year.
- About a third of people diagnosed with diabetes will experience complications such as diabetic retinopathy, heart disease and kidney failure.
- Diabetes is also tipped to become one of this century's worst health epidemics with predictions that by 2030, more than 366 million people across the globe will have the condition.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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