

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BRAIN REPAIR CENTRE RECEIVES FUNDING FOR MAJOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

HALIFAX, NS: 1 August 2002 - The Brain Repair Centre (BRC) will receive \$2.1 million through the Atlantic Innovation Fund (AIF) for a research and development project investigating stem cell use in the repair and treatment of brain disorders and spinal cord injury. The Honorable Robert Thibault, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Geoff Regan, Member of Parliament for Halifax West, made the announcement yesterday at an event at Dalhousie University. In addition to the AIF contribution, partner institutions will provide matching funds toward the total project cost of \$5.5 million.

The innovative research project will develop stem cell lines with a special focus on adult sources. These lines could be used in the treatment and repair of brain disorders such as Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease, multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injury.

This project will build on existing stem cell and molecular biology expertise and enhance the brain repair research cluster in Halifax and Atlantic Canada. It will also complement the existing neural transplantation program, unique in Canada and one of only four worldwide.

The AIF is a five-year Government of Canada initiative administered by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA). "Nova Scotia's universities and post-secondary institutions are among the most innovative and forward-thinking in the world," said Minister Thibault. "They demonstrate what the Government of Canada is trying to achieve with the Atlantic Innovation Fund – to stimulate partnerships among universities, research centres and industry leaders with the goal of moving more of our cutting-edge research from the labs into the marketplace."

"These projects will help build the region's capacity to undertake leading edge R&D, and the research involved has tremendous potential for commercialization," said Mr. Regan.

Stem cells show remarkable potential to replace cells that die as a result of aging, injury and disease of the central nervous system. This field of innovative research has the potential to revolutionize the practice of medicine and lead to new therapeutic modalities for a range of devastating brain disorders.

"Stem cells offer tremendous opportunity for the development of 'cell therapies' that could replace damaged cells caused by brain disorders and spinal cord damage," said Dr. Ivar Mendez, Head of the Division of Neurosurgery at Dalhousie University, Director of Research for the Department of Surgery, Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre and chair of the BRC.

- more -

“This research has the potential to improve the lives of millions of Canadians and people all over the world. This initiative will increase our capacity for research and development, as well as our ability to attract and educate the best in the field,” added Dr. Mendez. “The project will strengthen existing regional and national research collaborations, develop intellectual property and encourage academic-industry partnerships for the commercialization of new medical products and services.”

This research is expected to result in products with commercial potential such as novel cell lines as well as protocols for use in transplantation. The project will also generate instruments and methods for cell delivery and neurotransplantation kits, leading to new methods of repairing brain disorders.

The Brain Repair Centre is a multidisciplinary collaboration linking more than 100 world-class researchers and physicians in Atlantic Canada specializing in groundbreaking treatments and technologies in the field of brain repair. They range from surgeons who replace tissue in the human brain to recover lost capability, to scientists in the field of imaging, stem cell neurobiology, pharmacology, psychiatry, ophthalmology, neurology and cognitive neuroscience. The BRC partnership support includes ACOA, Capital Health, Dalhousie University, the Government of Nova Scotia, National Research Council’s Institute for Biodiagnostics and the National Research Council’s Industrial Research Assistance Program.

The AIF project will add to the growing infrastructure of the Life Sciences Research Village, a virtual and actual research community linking researchers, entrepreneurs, industry, technology professionals and organizations that support the life sciences sector across Atlantic Canada.

The \$300-million Atlantic Innovation Fund is a five-year Government of Canada initiative that is administered by ACOA. It is designed to build the economy of Atlantic Canada by increasing the region's capacity to carry out leading edge R&D that directly contributes to the development of new technology-based economic activity in the region. Specifically, the Fund is aimed at increasing the R&D being carried out in Atlantic research facilities leading to the launch of new ideas, products, processes and services.

- 30 -

Contact: Brain Repair Centre
902-473-3355
brainrepair@dal.ca