

Canada's New Government and Quebec Government Make one of the Largest Investments in International Genomics Research

Genome Canada, Génome Québec and Université de Montréal launch P3G Consortium and CARTaGENE Project

Montréal, May 22, 2007 — The Honourable Maxime Bernier, Minister of Industry, and Mr. Raymond Bachand, Quebec Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export, and Minister of Tourism, along with Dr. Martin Godbout, President and CEO of Genome Canada, Mr. Paul L'Archevêque, President and CEO of Génome Québec, and Mr. Luc Vinet, Rector of the Université de Montréal, today announced \$34.5 million in funding for the International Consortium known as the Public Population Project in Genomics (P3G), which includes the Quebec-based CARTaGENE project.

Counting all the contributions from international partners, the total budget of the initiative could reach \$64.5 million. "Our Government is charting a new direction for innovation in Canada with our recently released science and technology strategy – Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's Advantage. It is a direction that links the energy of our entrepreneurs to the energy of our scientists" said the Honourable Maxime Bernier, Minister of Industry.

The inclusion of the CARTaGENE project's expertise in the Consortium places Canada at the forefront of research on population genomics. Already a world leader in population health, Canada will now be able to offer researchers a world-class resource for scientific discovery to improve the health and well-being of people around the world." Minister Bachand noted the commitment of the Government of Quebec to research, particularly in the cutting-edge field of genomics.

"Our genomics researchers rank among world leaders in the development of insight into both environmental and genetic determinants of health," said Minister Bachand. "The funding for P3G/CARTaGENE represents a key effort to support scientific research and innovation in a sector where Quebec excels. This initiative confirms our leadership role, but it also helps to integrate our research teams into the major international science networks. This is an essential condition for the success of Quebec's research and innovation strategy."

Since its creation, Genome Canada has invested in long-term partnerships with numerous provincial and private-sector institutions at home and abroad, thereby ensuring for Canadian researchers in genomics and proteomics a place among the world leaders in this field.

"Genome Canada has participated in many large-scale international collaborations," stated Dr. Martin Godbout, "but P3G is unique in its scope and potential for advancing population genomics research. We are proud to support international collaboration in this field, with the ultimate goal of improving resources for the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease, both in Canada and internationally."

"Today's announcement is the outcome of many years of effort by Génome Québec to maximize this initiative's impact and applications," noted Mr. Paul L'Archevêque, President and CEO of Génome Québec. "This highly formative project for genomics research in Quebec will provide to local researchers resources and an infrastructure that are innovative and versatile, speeding up research into genes that are responsible for disease. It will become

easier to develop appropriate medications and treatments, and the population of Quebec will be the first to benefit from the actual scientific and medical results of the research.” P3G is a Montréal-based non-profit international consortium founded in 2003, and dedicated to fostering collaboration between researchers and projects in the field of population genomics. It was conceived and developed by Professor Bartha Maria Knoppers of the Université de Montréal and Dr. Thomas Hudson of the University of Toronto (formerly of McGill University), along with a number of other internationally respected collaborators. An organization with members from 25 countries, P3G will harmonize and coordinate a number of large-scale projects in genetic epidemiology undertaken around the world. For Mr. Luc Vinet, Rector of the Université de Montréal, P3G is an outstanding initiative in many respects. “This initiative is the most ambitious ever undertaken here in the field of genomics. It is also the first to be led by a professor of social sciences,” said Mr. Vinet. “The very structure of P3G thus entrenches the vital importance of ethical and social considerations in the increasingly vast field of exploring our genes.”

As former Chair of the International Ethics Committee of the Human Genome Project (HUGO), Professor Knoppers has been concerned with the ethical and legal issues surrounding genomics research. This concern is reflected in the Consortium’s emphasis on the creation of harmonization tools facilitating international collaboration and governance. “As our knowledge of genetics expands, so does the need for framework mechanisms,” said Dr. Knoppers, the project’s director. “By creating P3G and incorporating the work of CARTaGENE into it, we are hoping to advance the frontiers of human genetics research in a way that respects both our values and our humanity.” Professor Knoppers also oversees CARTaGENE along with Dr. Claude Laberge, a population genomics expert affiliated with Université Laval in Québec City, and other scientists. In its first phase this epidemiological and biological data bank is seeking the participation of 20 000 Quebec residents aged 40 to 69.

The CARTaGENE data will provide better insight into how genes interact and how the environment influences their interaction. “As a leader in population genetics, CARTaGENE is one of the drivers of P3G,” said Dr. Laberge. “This infrastructure will function as a precursor for the development and testing of standards for large biobanks.”

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