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MEDIA RELEASE

\$11 million schizophrenia research partnership

NSW Premier Morris Iemma today officially launched a unique, Australian-first partnership in schizophrenia research between the Schizophrenia Research Institute (SRI), Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute (POWMI), University of New South Wales (UNSW), Macquarie Bank Foundation and NSW Health.

\$2.45 million has been provided by the New South Wales Government to SRI and UNSW to establish Australia's first Evidence Library dedicated to schizophrenia research and a new Chair in Schizophrenia Epidemiology and Population Health Research.

Mr Iemma also officially opened the purpose-built Schizophrenia Research Laboratory of Professor Cyndi Shannon Weickert at POWMI and announced her appointment as the inaugural Macquarie Bank Foundation Chair of Schizophrenia Research. The Macquarie Bank Foundation has contributed \$1.375 million to the partnership. Professor Shannon Weickert is a world renowned researcher whose work focuses on molecular biology of growth factors related to schizophrenia and brain development.

Professor Vaughan Carr, CEO of SRI said, "This joint initiative is very exciting; the establishment of an Evidence Library supported by a Professor in Schizophrenia Epidemiology and Population Health will allow new information and advances to be disseminated to clinicians with the view to improving the care of patients."

"This Chair in Schizophrenia Epidemiology and Population Health Research will complement the Macquarie Bank Foundation Chair of Schizophrenia Research through strong collaborative links and, through this, both Chairs will make significant and unique contributions to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of schizophrenia," said Dean of UNSW's Faculty of Medicine, Professor Peter Smith. The new professorial Chair will be a first for Australia and will conduct population based research into schizophrenia using new and existing data bases.

POWMI Executive Director & CEO, Professor Peter Schofield said, "The Institute is delighted to host the Schizophrenia Research Laboratory, which will be an important tool in the battle against a debilitating mental illness that costs the Australian community \$2.6 billion annually."

Head of the Macquarie Bank Foundation, Ms Julie White, says the Foundation is extremely proud to be a major partner of SRI and involved with such an important initiative.

"Finding answers to this disease will not happen without significant resources being applied to bench top science," she said.

Professor Vaughan Carr says the \$11 million collaboration between so many organisations is an exciting development.

“This unique partnership between government, the corporate sector and the research community positions NSW at the forefront of the Australian schizophrenia research effort, and will facilitate the translation of research into early detection, better treatment and prevention.”

Schizophrenia – the facts

- One in 100 Australians will develop schizophrenia
- It strikes principally between the ages of 15 and 25 years
- The ratio of males to females affected is 60:40
- One in twenty people diagnosed with the disease will suicide
- 85% are dependent on government welfare benefits.
- The cost to the Australian community is around \$2.6 billion annually
- Schizophrenia contributes to many contemporary social problems including youth suicide, homelessness, and substance abuse
- The cause of schizophrenia is unknown and there currently is no cure

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