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Media Statement

WA RESEARCHER REVEALS HOPES TO REWRITE THE FUTURE FOR DIABETES

Nearly 10 years since he and his family made the move from Melbourne to Perth to set up WA's Centre for Diabetes Research, one of Australia's leading genetic scientists, Grant Morahan, has made some of his medical research plans a reality.

But for the motivated Professor, the critical next phase of work – to take his team's globally-significant laboratory-based discoveries and better the lives of people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes – is just beginning.

Over the last decade, Australia's foremost diabetes genetics researcher has helped plan and coordinate some of the largest genetic studies ever conducted through his role on the Steering Committee of the Type 1 Diabetes Genetics Consortium – an international effort that pinpointed more than 40 genes causing type 1 diabetes. Knowledge of these genes may ultimately be used to create better treatments, and prevent or cure the disease.

On November 13, the eve of World Diabetes Day, Professor Morahan will share his hopes for the future with supporters of Perth charity Diabetes Research WA.

Formerly the Diabetes Research Foundation of WA, Diabetes Research WA was integral in luring Professor Morahan to Perth, along with The University of Western Australia, the Perkins Institute of Medical Research (formerly the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research), and a number of corporate and individual donors who raised \$2.3 million.

"Since creating the Centre in early 2005, we've, fortunately, exceeded expectations and we're doing everything we can to ensure the next 10 years will be even more successful," he explained.

He's also grown his team from nothing to 15 staff and students, while attracting \$15 million in competitive grant funding to WA, including \$1.7 million from the US National Institutes of Health.

"We've been able to use that funding to make great advances in all of the areas we set out to make a difference in – understanding the genetics of type 1 and type 2 diabetes, both of which are on the rise globally, as well as their complications, and investigating how to create insulin-secreting cells from stem cells.

"Our focus is now on ensuring the breakthroughs we've made don't stay in the scientific domain but go on to improve the lives of those affected by diabetes and we're working hard to raise the funds to do that."

Diabetes Research WA executive director Sherl Westlund said the charity's fundraising initiatives and corporate sponsor partnerships were squarely focused on helping exciting WA researchers like Professor Morahan.

"It is always challenging for medical researchers to secure the funds they need because it's a long road from getting the initial idea to impacting patients but the work that WA's Centre for Diabetes Research is doing shows that if more funding is found, we have a good chance of rewriting the future for diabetes," she said.

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