Over $15m invested in world-leading cancer immunotherapy

University of Auckland spinout targeting new cancer treatment

Auckland, 25 May, 2022: TamoRx, a biotech start-up recently spun out of the University of Auckland, has received NZ$15.25m investment to accelerate development of a new treatment for cancer. The company, founded by Dr Joanna Mathy and Professor Rod Dunbar from the university's School of Biological Sciences, aims to develop a new immunotherapy medicine that will help patients' immune systems destroy their cancer cells.

The investment was led by the life science investor Brandon Capital, along with the University of Auckland Inventors' Fund, managed by UniServices, the University's commercialisation and research impact company. The investment includes a Callaghan Innovation repayable grant of $750,000, administered by Brandon Capital, one of the four partners selected for the Callaghan Innovation Technology Incubator Programme.

The TamoRx team, led by Dr Mathy, will focus on improving the immune attack on cancer cells within tumours. "We discovered a new mechanism that restricts the immune system from fighting cancer," she says. "We are aiming to free patients' immune systems from this restriction and increase the immune attack on cancer cells within tumours. To do this we need to develop new drugs that can target this immune control mechanism without affecting other cells in the body. We want to move quickly so we can bring new immunotherapy to patients as soon as possible, and the scale of this new investment will allow us to move all the way to early-stage clinical trials if we're successful in our pre-clinical development."

Professor Dunbar continues: "We know that immunotherapy is the most promising therapy to achieve long-term survival from cancer in cases where it has spread through the body. Although this kind of therapy can cure some patients with even the most advanced cancer, we need to be able to target many different mechanisms within the immune system to enable more patients to benefit. The new immune control pathway we discovered offers new hope for a broad range of cancer patients."

"The team has a unique insight that can help to build a completely new approach to immunotherapy and that's why we're excited to lead this investment," says Duncan Mackintosh, Brandon Capital's New Zealand head. "We have a world-class team developing what could be a revolutionary therapy for cancer patients globally and it's great to see this happen from New Zealand, really highlighting the capability of our research community." Mackintosh adds.

"It has been a privilege to work with the team to form and secure investment into TamoRx. UniServices is proud to support TamoRx and help to advance them to reach the full potential of this novel approach to cancer therapy," says Evelyn Body, Director of Commercialisation, UniServices.

In April 2016, New Zealand joined the Brandon Capital-managed Brandon BioCatalyst Collaboration (originally called the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund) enabling New Zealand research organisations to become members and seek investment support for emerging technologies.

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About TamoRx

TamoRx is an Auckland-based biotechnology company focussed on developing a new immunotherapy medicine that will act as a treatment for cancer.

Immunotherapy is the most promising therapy to achieve long-term survival from cases where the cancer has spread through the body but different mechanisms within the immune system need to be targeted. TamoRx's research team has discovered a new mechanism that restricts the immune system from fighting cancer. The research team are developing a new therapy that aims to free patient's immune systems from this restriction to increase immune attack on cancer cells within tumours offering a new hope for a broad range of cancer patients.

TamoRx is funded by Brandon BioCatalyst and the University of Auckland Inventors' Fund, managed by UniServices.

About Brandon BioCatalyst and Brandon Capital

Brandon Capital is Australasia's leading life science venture capital firm, with a strong global presence supported by key partnerships and team members across the US and UK. From early-stage seed investment through to expansion capital, Brandon Capital supports life science companies from proof-of-concept through to commercialisation.

Managed by Brandon Capital, Brandon BioCatalyst is a unique collaboration of over 50 leading medical research institutes, investors, and government united by a single purpose: progressing the next generation of medical therapies and technology which improve health and save lives.

www.brandoncapital.vc | www.brandonbiocatalyst.com

About UniServices

UniServices is a not-for-profit company of the University of Auckland that champions research and ideas with the power to change the world. From seeking out and bringing together partners in academic institutions, industry and government to build new knowledge and solutions through research; to whakatupu (nurturing) and commercialising the ideas and intellectual property that arise from the University of Auckland’s great minds, we act as the kaihono (those who join and link people to people, and people to projects), firmly entrenched in the ecosystem that bridges the world of academia with business, government and our communities.

About Callaghan Innovation

Callaghan Innovation is New Zealand’s innovation agency. It activates innovation and helps businesses grow faster for a better Aotearoa.

The government agency partners with ambitious businesses of all sizes, delivering a range of innovation and research and development (R&D) services to suit each stage of their growth. Its staff – including more than 200 of Aotearoa’s leading scientists and engineers – empower innovators by connecting people, opportunities and networks, and providing tailored technical solutions, skills and capability development programmes, and grants co-funding.

Callaghan Innovation also enhances the operation of Aotearoa’s innovation ecosystem, working closely with MBIE, NZTE, NZVIF, Crown Research Institutes, and other organisations that help increase business investment in R&D and innovation. The agency operates from five urban offices and a regional partner network in a further 12 locations across Aotearoa.

For more information head to www.callaghaninnovation.govt.nz