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Australia developing new tools to improve diagnosis, treatment of blood cancer

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Australian scientists will use new technology to improve the diagnosis and treatment of blood cancers, which affect 1.24 million people globally, including 720,000 who die from leukemia, lymphoma or myeloma each year.

The Centre for Cancer Biology (CCB), an alliance between the University of South Australia and SA Pathology, has been awarded $1 million as part of a $2.5 million national genomic project led by the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute.

An international team of researchers will use new technologies to cross reference genomic data and speed up the diagnosis and treatment of blood, ovarian and breast cancers, thanks to the Medical Research Future Fund.

Section Head of the CCB Molecular Pathology Research Laboratory, Associate Professor Chris Hahn, says Adelaide researchers will focus on blood cancers, developing powerful new functional experiments to identify which genetic variants are harmful and which are benign.

“In Australia, about 17,000 people are diagnosed with blood cancers every year (1.24 million worldwide) and we think that about 20 per cent of those carry a genetically inherited component. While we can efficiently and accurately identify thousands of genetic mutations or variants, what we don’t know is whether they cause cancer or not. This project will help us do that,” Assoc Prof Hahn says.