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Australian government invests $20 M to find new therapies for childhood brain cancers

February 5, 2024 | News

A new National Childhood Brain Cancer Clinical Trial Consortium will be established

The Australian government is funding a wide-ranging national research programme that will give new hope and help to Australian children, adolescents and young adults with childhood brain cancers, including Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma (DIPG).

Up to $20 million will be made available over seven years through the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) for clinical trials and vital work to find new treatments.

While the overall survival rate for childhood cancer is now over 80%, brain cancers are the most common solid tumours in children. Brain cancers are also the deadliest, causing more deaths in children than any other cancer.

DIPG is a rare and highly aggressive childhood brain cancer, with few effective treatment options and poor prognosis outcomes. Only 1 in 10 children with DIPG survive for two years after diagnosis, and less than 1 in 100 survive for five years.

As part of this programme, a new National Childhood Brain Cancer Clinical Trial Consortium will be established. The Consortium will promote collaboration between countries and across disciplines throughout the research sector to develop new research approaches to treatment development and better clinical care.

The Consortium will work to ensure that priority populations get better access to clinical trials and better data will mean current and emerging treatments can be more quickly assessed for safety and efficacy. There will also be a focus on improving the quality of life and survival outcomes for people with DIPG and other childhood brain cancers.

The $20 million research fund builds on other work by the Australian government to provide hope to families with DIPG, including securing access to an experimental medicine, ONC201 (dordaviprone), which will now be available to eligible Australian patients through an Expanded Access Programme. Access to ONC201 is a welcome breakthrough and comes after Health Minister Mark Butler contacted the US pharmaceutical company, Chimerix, to request access to the product for

an Australian patient through their Expanded Access Programme and the TGA administered Special Access Programme for unapproved medicines.