

For immediate release

ALZHEIMER SOCIETY RESEARCH PROGRAM AWARDS RECORD \$4.5 MILLION IN FUNDING

EXCELLENCE IN CANADIAN RESEARCH COULD HOLD KEY TO CURE AND BETTER TREATMENT

Toronto, ON, May 29, 2013 – Canadian researchers pursuing answers to Alzheimer's disease have just been awarded \$4.5 million in funding, including a record \$4 million from the Alzheimer Society of Canada's Alzheimer Society Research Program (ASRP).

The money will be invested in 38 new research projects from across the country aimed at improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment, as well as finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

"This is a significant boost for dementia research and further builds the capacity of Canadian researchers and research facilities," says Mimi Lowi-Young, CEO at the Alzheimer Society of Canada. "Canada is home to some of the world's best researchers and the Society is committed to supporting them. Their projects could fundamentally change the lives of people already impacted by this devastating disease and improve the outlook for those at risk."

Dr. Cheryl Wellington, a professor in the Department of Pathology at the University of British Columbia, is among the 38 awardees determined to change the course of dementia. Her work is delving deeper into the heart-brain connection. It is widely known that heart disease increases the risk of Alzheimer's, and that people with it have significant changes in the blood vessels in their brains. Less understood is whether these vascular changes contribute to dementia. Wellington will attempt to unravel this relationship by testing to see if changes in "good cholesterol," which is known to protect from heart disease, may also prevent Alzheimer's.

At the University of Toronto, Pooja Viswanathan is taking her computer science know-how out of the lab and into long-term care settings. Sixty to 80 per cent of residents who have dementia are often denied powered wheelchairs because of safety concerns and some are not strong enough to operate manual chairs. A postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, Viswanathan intends to use artificial intelligence to build a 'smart' wheelchair equipped with a small camera and sensors to not only restore mobility and independence to residents but keep them safe as well.

"I never fail to be inspired by the exciting ideas that the researchers put forward and the possibilities for the outcomes of these studies to improve the quality of life," says Dr. Lynn Beattie, Chair of the Alzheimer Society's Research Policy Committee. "Great promise is shown by these doctoral and post-doctoral candidates; they're the foundation for building dementia research."

Breakthroughs in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of dementia are desperately needed while also ensuring research can help people with dementia live well with the condition today. Alzheimer's disease remains incurable. Some drugs may temporarily improve symptoms, but none can slow, stop or reverse the disease. There are 747,000 Canadians living with dementia today. That number is expected to increase to 1.4 million by 2031.

This year's record ASRP funding was made possible by a generous million-dollar donation from Paul Higgins Jr. and Michael Higgins, co-CEOs of Mother Parkers. The money was, raised through the *Mother Parkers Remembers* fundraising campaign to honour their father Paul Sr. who had Alzheimer's disease.

Funding also includes \$450,000 from the Pacific Alzheimer Research Foundation (Vancouver) in support of researchers based in British Columbia, and \$75,000 from the Firefly Foundation (Toronto) to support postdoctoral trainees in Ontario.

"We're tremendously grateful to our partners and to all Canadians who support our work each day," adds Lowi-Young. "Still, we need to invest more money into research. \$4.5 million doesn't compare to the \$33 billion dollars we're spending now on dementia care."

For a complete listing of this year's research recipients and to support the Alzheimer Society Research Program, visit: www.alzheimer.ca.

About the Alzheimer Society Research Program

The Alzheimer Society Research Program is an annual peer-reviewed research funding competition of the Alzheimer Society of Canada. The Program is supported by Alzheimer Societies across Canada and their generous donors to fund emerging and established investigators working in the biomedical and quality-of-life fields. The Program was launched in 1989 and has, to date, invested over \$40 million in research.

About the Alzheimer Society

The Alzheimer Society is the leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in communities across Canada, the Society offers help for today through our programs and services and hope for tomorrow by funding research to find the cause and the cure.

-30-

Media contact:

Rosanne Meandro
Director, Media Relations
Alzheimer Society of Canada
Direct: 416-847-8920
Mobile: 416-669-5715
rmeandro@alzheimer.ca
www.alzheimer.ca