

Press Release

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EU INVESTS €7.7 MILLION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST LUNG DISEASE

Approximately €7.7 million has been offered under the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme for a pioneering cross-border research project, designed to better understand and alleviate the impact of lung disease.

€7.7 million has been offered to the Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), in partnership with Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and University of the West of Scotland (UWS), to deliver the 'BREATH' (Border and Regions Airways Training Hub) project.

The project will involve a strong cross-border partnership between the Smooth Muscle Research Centre (DkIT), the School of Pharmacy and School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences (QUB) and the Institute of Biomedical & Environmental Health Research (UWS).

It will establish a world-class cluster of researchers, involving collaborations between scientists and clinicians, that will help address the causes, treatment and potential prevention of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

COPD is an incurable respiratory condition characterised by progressive airflow reduction, breathing difficulties and irreversible lung damage (emphysema). It significantly impairs quality of life and has a high cost to health services and the wider economy. In 2011 the annual economic burden of COPD across the EU was estimated at approximately €141.4 billion.

COPD-related hospital admission is higher in Ireland than any other developed country and the condition is also particularly prevalent across Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway COPD-related hospital admission is amongst the highest in the UK and hotspots also occur throughout Northern Ireland, particularly in major urban areas and in the border regions.

Match-funding for the project has been provided by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in Ireland, the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland and the University of the West of Scotland (UWS).



Welcoming the funding award Northern Ireland's Minister for the Economy Simon Hamilton MLA, said: **“This innovative research initiative is an excellent example of how clinicians, academia and industry can harness their collective multi-disciplinary expertise to produce positive outcomes for patients and their families living with this disease. This combination of research, education and innovation will seek to reverse the detrimental impact of this disease upon quality of life for individuals, leading to reduced demands on valuable Health Service resources and increased productivity within the local economy.”**

Commenting on the project, Ireland's Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Mary Mitchell O'Connor, said: **"I am delighted that my Department is co-funding this valuable initiative, which will hopefully bring lasting benefits to sufferers of COPD and will build on the research capability of the colleges involved. INTERREG is a very valuable initiative for developing cross-border cooperation in research and thereby share and enhance expertise in both jurisdictions, by combining different specialties for a shared goal. Enhanced health outcomes, high level scientific skills in the colleges and opportunities for Life Sciences companies will represent positive long-term results from this project."**

Recognising the importance of the project Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), responsible for managing the EU's INTERREG VA Programme, said: **“This EU-funded project will establish a world-class cluster of researchers who, by working in partnership, will make a positive difference to the fight against a debilitating health issue which effects many people living across the UK and Ireland.**

“Working on a cross-border basis the project partners will be able to share information and produce data that can help improve the quality of life for people living on both sides of the border. It will also provide excellent development opportunities for a number of PhD students and has strong potential to create spin off benefits for all those involved,” she continued.

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Notes to Editor:

SEUPB

- The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.
- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The INTERREG VA Programme has a value of €283 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu