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New HHMI Program Aims to Nurture Nation's Best Early Career Scientists

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) today announced a major new program that will provide much-needed support to some of the nation's best early career faculty at a time when they most need the help. The new program is aimed at researchers who have run their own labs for two to six years and are now at a critical point in establishing their own vibrant, independent research programs.

Through a national competition that opens today, HHMI plans to select as many as 70 early career scientists from a wide range of scientific disciplines relevant to biological and medical inquiry. These scientists, most of whom will be assistant professors at the time of the award, will receive six-year, non-renewable appointments to HHMI and receive the substantial research support necessary to move their research in creative, new directions. HHMI will invest more than \$300 million in this first group of scientists and plans a second competition in 2011.

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— **Thomas R. Cech**

This initiative comes at a critical moment for the nation and the long-term health of its medical research infrastructure. Funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the nation's largest supporter of basic biomedical research, has remained essentially flat during the last five years. Nowhere has the impact of this constrained funding been felt more keenly than by early career stage faculty who are trying to win their first research project (R01) grants from NIH.

In considering where HHMI's resources could have the greatest impact outside its core HHMI Investigator Program, HHMI President Thomas R. Cech and others saw a clear opportunity.

We decided to focus on scientists who have led their own laboratories for several years because many of these scientists are at a high point of their creativity just as they see their start-up funds and early-career awards ending, said Cech. Some of them may still be in line for their first NIH R01 grant, while others may have their first grant but are facing the very challenging first renewal of that grant. It is this period of career vulnerability that the HHMI Early Career Scientist Program aims to bridge.

Scientists often begin their first faculty position with generous institutional start-up funds, and they may later win one or more non-renewable national awards to support their research. However, they are soon under pressure to apply for federal research grants.

For that reason, HHMI is focusing on researchers who have led independent laboratories for two to six years at one of the approximately 200 U.S. medical schools, universities, and research institutes that are eligible. Those who are selected by HHMI will receive six-year, non-renewable appointments including full salary and research support while remaining affiliated with their home institution.

We know there is a tremendous need for flexible funding to support scientists who are two to six years into their independent research careers, said Jack Dixon, HHMI vice president and chief scientific officer. This is a critical time for these scientists because many have not yet been able to obtain the kind of stable funding that would permit them to move their own research in creative new directions.

In choosing the early career scientists, HHMI will be guided by the principle of people, not projects, which it has used in selecting HHMI investigators. HHMI support will provide the early career scientists with the freedom to explore and, if necessary, to change direction in their research, Dixon said.

HHMI is seeking scientists from a wide variety of fields, including all areas of basic biological and biomedical research, and areas of chemistry, physics, computer science and engineering that are directly related to biology or medicine. Candidates are being asked to apply directly to HHMI, an approach the Institute has used successfully in previous competitions in 2006 and 2007. In the past, faculty members had to be nominated by their institutions for HHMI research positions.

Successful candidates are expected to meet the following criteria:

** Have a doctoral degree.*

** Hold a tenured or tenure-track position as assistant professor or higher academic rank at one of the eligible institutions; if the applicant is at an institution that does not have a tenure track, he or she should hold an equivalent appointment. Federal government employees are not eligible.*

** Have at least 2 but no more than 6 years of experience since their initial appointment as an assistant professor (or equivalent). To meet this*

requirement the applicant's first faculty position as assistant professor must have begun no earlier than June 1, 2002 and no later than Sept. 1, 2006.

** Those selected as HHMI early career scientists may hold only one other early career award, such as those from The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Searle Foundation, The Burroughs-Wellcome Fund, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The Arnold and Mabel Beckman Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, or the NIH Director's New Innovator Award or the NSF CAREER Award.*

** To be appointed as an early career scientist, the successful candidate must devote 75% of his or her time to the direct conduct of research.*

Scientists who wish to be considered for this competition must indicate their intention to submit an application by April 30, 2008. The deadline for completed applications is June 10, 2008. Panels of distinguished biomedical researchers will evaluate the candidates' applications. Final selections are expected to be made by February 2009.

Detailed information about the competition □ including the list of eligible institutions and access to the secure application site □ may be found at the HHMI web site at www.hhmi.org/research/competitions/earlycareer2009/.

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a non-profit medical research organization that ranks as one of the nation's largest philanthropies, plays a powerful role in advancing biomedical research and science education in the United States. In the past two decades HHMI has made investments of more than \$8.3 billion for the support, training, and education of the nation's most creative and promising scientists.

HHMI's principal mission is conducting basic biomedical research, which it carries out in collaboration with more than 60 universities, medical centers and other research institutions throughout the United States. Approximately 300 HHMI investigators, along with a scientific staff of more than 2,000, work at these institutions in Hughes laboratories. In a complementary program at HHMI's Janelia Farm Research Campus in Loudoun County, Virginia, leading scientists are pursuing long-term, high-risk, high-reward research in a campus specially designed to bring together researchers from disparate disciplines. The Institute's biomedical research expenditures during fiscal year 2007 totaled \$599 million.

HHMI researchers are widely recognized for their creativity and productivity: 122 HHMI investigators are members of the National Academy of Sciences and there are currently 12 Nobel laureates within the investigator community.

The Institute also has a philanthropic grants program that emphasizes initiatives with the power to transform graduate and undergraduate education in the life sciences. Additionally, it supports the work of biomedical researchers in many countries around the globe. Through aggregate

investments of more than \$1.2 billion, the Institute has sought to reinvigorate life science education at both research universities and liberal arts colleges and to engage the nation's leading scientists in teaching. HHMI grants totaled \$86 million in fiscal year 2007.

HHMI has an endowment of approximately \$18.7 billion. Its headquarters are located in Chevy Chase, Maryland, just outside Washington, D.C.