

Woolcock Institute's \$10 million Refurbishment Creates Unique Facility

Australia's first large scale 'Time Isolation Research Unit', offering the most advanced acoustic and vibration isolation laboratory in the southern hemisphere, will be unveiled on Friday 6th February, 2009 as part of the Woolcock Institute's new \$10 million refurbishment.

The Research Institute is located at 431 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, Sydney and will be officially opened at 3pm by the Hon. Jodi McKay, Minister for Science and Medical Research and Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir, Governor NSW.

"The Time Isolation Unit is one of only four such facilities in the world", Professor Norbert Berend, Director, Woolcock Institute of Medical Research said.

"We are now able to study people over long periods of time and control the light, noise, air temperature and everything the person sees, eats and hears. The room is set-up like a hotel room but the volunteers are visually monitored 24 hours a day.

"This new facility will allow us to conduct research in the areas of shift work, noise, jet lag, long distance driving, military, defence, space travel and security.

Mark Compton, Chairman of the Board said "The Woolcock Institute has already been recognised as one of the top six breathing and sleep disorders research centres in the world but today we are opening a comprehensive national facility that is unique in the world and providing high quality research, clinical practice and education.

"These new facilities will capitalise upon co-location of our collective expertise, expand our research capabilities and drive new thinking and initiatives. Our research into the causes, treatments and prevention of asthma, allergies, chronic obstructive pulmonary [lung] disease (COPD), cystic fibrosis and sleep disorders will be greatly expanded and enhanced by these new facilities."

A new interdisciplinary medical clinic will also be opened which is unique in the way it combines care between different specialties treating a range of medical conditions.

Mr Compton said, "The new clinic is all about coordinated, well planned care for patients. Patients can make appointments to see world class medical specialists and if required have diagnostic tests done at the same time and in the same building".

The Woolcock received grants of \$5 million from the Australian Government and \$5 million from the NSW Government to purpose design and fit-out a new home for all of the Woolcock's activities and its rapidly growing research, clinical practice and education programs.

The new facility includes several 'best-in-class' elements, including:

- Large state of the art lung physiology testing laboratory space
 - Three full-function Body Box Plethysmographs
 - A complete complement of both 'off-the-shelf' and customised lung function equipment – allowing the validation of novel tests for lung function
- A new and spacious exercise physiology testing laboratory, important to both pulmonary physiology, obesity and sleep/endocrine research

- 18-bed Diagnostic / Sleep / Noise Laboratory with state of the art diagnostic, video, and monitoring equipment.
 - Eight beds for intensive polysomnography [sleep studies]
 - Four beds for long-term intensive monitoring with external isolation
 - One long term intensive monitoring suite (with sound/light/vibration isolation and control) for chronobiology experimentation
 - One noise research suite (an apartment-like fit out which is completely sound isolated from the environment, into which noise may be introduced for research purposes)
 - Four beds with dual use – clinical interview and polysomnography or continuous testing of alertness or other aspects of brain function
 - Web-based monitoring to allow collaborators from around the world to interact with research subjects and their results
- Education facility – allowing for professional and community groups of up to 240 attendees to attend, with catering and service support for such functions
- 4-bed early phase clinical trials unit to test new medications
- Interdisciplinary private clinic
- Wet-lab space including advanced assay capability
- A fully equipped computer-controlled engineering research and development facility allowing rapid fabrication and prototyping of new equipment to support the researchers in their project work

The Woolcock employs 120 staff and has approximately 50 to 60 research studies running at any given time, investigating the cause of diseases, ways to prevent them developing, new treatments and diagnostic tools and methods in diseases such as asthma, allergies, sleep apnea, fatigue, restless leg syndrome, insomnia, endocrine disorders, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, cystic fibrosis and pulmonary physiology.

The building will also house the Cooperative Research Centre for Asthma and Airway Diseases, the Centre for Clinical Research Excellence in Respiratory and Sleep Medicine, the Australasian Sleep Trials Network and the Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring.

Professor Berend concluded, “It is the first time the Woolcock’s team has been located together in one facility. This next phase of the Woolcock’s development is a major milestone. There are many aspects of this new facility that are unique to Australia and provide a venue for leading edge research and clinical management”.

Woolcock Institute of Medical Research
PO Box M77 Missenden Road NSW 2050, Australia
W www.woolcock.org.au
