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ZikaPLAN: La Jolla Institute Unites with 25 Research Organizations to Fight Zika Virus and Build Long-term Outbreak Response Capacity in Latin America

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LA JOLLA, CA—La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology (LJI) is among the 25 leading research and public health organizations from Latin America, North America, Africa, Asia, and Europe gathered in Recife for the launch of ZikaPLAN (Zika Preparedness Latin American Network). This global initiative, created in response to a Horizon 2020 funding call by the European Commission’s Directorate-General Research and Innovation, has been formed to address the Zika virus outbreak and the many research and public health challenges it poses. The initiative takes a comprehensive approach to tackle the Zika threat by:

- **addressing the knowledge gaps and needs** in the current Zika outbreak to better understand the disease, prevent its spread and educate the affected populations,
- **building a sustainable response capacity** in Latin America for Zika and other emerging infectious diseases (EID).

La Jolla Institute, which is one of only two U.S. institutions participating in the ZikaPLAN consortium, will share reagents, resources and a deep knowledge of the role of T cells in the immune response to flaviviruses, which include Zika, dengue and yellow fever virus among others. “Zika is a global health challenge and we are proud to join forces with a network of international collaborators,” says professor Alessandro Sette, Ph.D., who heads the Center for Infectious Disease at LJI. “Creating the infrastructure to bring together more than two dozen organizations and draw on their combined expertise will allow us to make real progress against Zika and to react quickly to other emerging global healthy threats in the future.”

Dr. Sette, who is widely known for his work on defining the molecular signposts that are associated with protective or failed immune responses, will leverage his expertise in how the body successfully battles infection, and conversely, how pathogens escape the immune system. In addition, the Immune Epitope Database (IEDB), funded by the National Institutes of Health and curated by the La Jolla Institute, will play a central role parsing Zika’s interaction with the immune system. The IEDB contains the world’s largest collection of epitopes, the tiny molecular features recognized by the

immune system, which helps scientists to better understand how to induce a better immune response and to develop more effective vaccines.

Other research organizations in the ZikaPLAN consortium will look at Zika's connection with congenital syndromes and neurological complications, and the pathogenesis of severe cases, through a series of clinical studies. They will explore non-vector and vector transmission and risk factors for geographic spread, measure the burden of disease and investigate how the virus has evolved, comparing current and historic strains. ZikaPLAN will look at novel personal preventive measures, innovation in diagnostics and modelling of vector control and vaccine strategies to inform policy decisions. The social sciences will also play a role in ZikaPLAN, which aims to determine the best communication strategies to keep the affected communities informed.

ZikaPLAN will work closely with two other European Union-funded consortia, ZIKAction and ZikAlliance, to establish a Latin American and Caribbean network. This network will address the broader issue of building local capacity in Latin America to prepare for and rapidly launch a large-scale research response to emerging infectious disease threats. ZikaPLAN will contribute to developing an inter-epidemic research plan, policy recommendations, training, research networks and dissemination strategies that are designed to permanently strengthen local capacities, beyond the four years of the project. The three consortia will set up common bodies for the global management of scientific programs, communication, and ethical, regulatory and legal issues.



ZikaPLAN is receiving a €11.5 million grant from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, under grant agreement number 734584.

About La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology

La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology is dedicated to understanding the intricacies and power of the immune system so that we may apply that knowledge to promote human health and prevent a wide range of diseases. Since it's founding in 1988 as an independent, nonprofit research organization, the Institute has made numerous advances leading towards its goal: life without disease®.

About the ZikaPLAN Consortium

ZikaPLAN is coordinated by an Executive Board comprised of Prof. Annelies Wilder-Smith as director, representing the University of Umeå, Prof. Eduardo Massad, as deputy director, representing the Fundacao de Apoio a Universidade de Sao Paulo and 15 Work Package leaders from partner organizations. Independent ethical, scientific and industrial advisory boards provide guidance.

The consortium builds on expertise and existing relationships in a variety of research areas related to Zika and emerging infectious diseases. Members come from 5 continents, with 13 from Europe, 8 from Latin America, 2 from the United States, 1 from Africa and 1 from Asia.

ZikaPLAN consortium members:

- Antwerp Institute of Tropical Medicine, Belgium
- Associação Técnica–Científica de Estudo Colaborativo Latino Americano de Malformações Congênicas, Brazil
- Erasmus Universitair Medisch Centrum Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- Fondation Mérieux, France
- Fundação de Apoio à Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil
- Fundação Oswaldo Fiocruz, Brazil
- Fundación Universidad del Norte, Colombia
- Institut Pasteur de Dakar, Senegal
- Institut Pasteur, France
- Instituto Butantan, Brazil
- Instituto de Medicina Tropical Pedro Kourí, Cuba
- International Vaccine Institute, Republic of Korea
- Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium
- La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology, USA
- London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK
- Queen Mary University of London, UK
- Schweizerisches Tropen- und Public Health-Institut, Switzerland
- The Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford, UK
- The University of Liverpool, UK
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA
- Ulster University, UK
- Umeå University, Sweden
- Universidad del Valle, Colombia
- Universidade de Pernambuco, Brazil
- University of Glasgow, UK

A ZikaPLAN website will soon be available on [The Global Health Network](#) web portal.

La Jolla Institute Media Contact

Gina Kirchweger

Tel.: +1 858 357 7481

gina@lji.org

ZikaPLAN Media Contact

Koren Wolman Tardy

Tel.: +33 6 13 94 51 14

koren.wolman-tardy@fondation-merieux.org