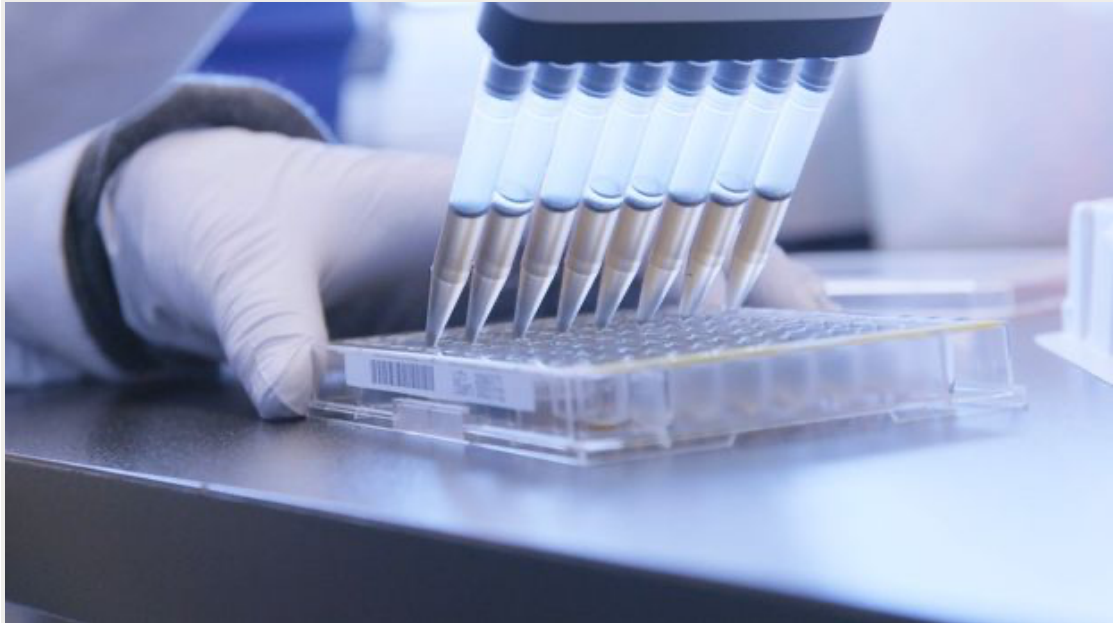


# Early-stage cancer research projects aim to fast track the 20-year cycle of drug discovery

CONTENT FROM IRICOR

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The LeadAction-Onco competition targets early-stage research projects, focused on advancing cancer treatments, from scientists across Canada.

Cancer continues to have a devastating effect on Canadians, with one out of every two people being diagnosed with the disease.

Although treatments have evolved significantly over the last decades and outcomes have improved because of advancements like immunotherapy, there's still much more work to be done.

Research is one of the most important cornerstones to keep the momentum going.

It's one of the key reasons **IRICoR** (a Canadian research commercialization hub specializing in cancer drug discovery) and the **Oncopole** (a hub for cancer research, development and investment) announced the launch of the LeadAction-Onco competition in September 2018. Both organizations are based in Quebec, which is rapidly emerging as a world leader in the field.

By targeting early-stage research projects from scientists across the country, the competition aims to advance cutting-edge cancer treatments for the benefit of Canadian and international patients.

Since its creation in 2008, IRICoR has played a valuable role in focusing on acceleration of the discovery and development of innovative projects towards commercialization of cancer therapies.

This not-for-profit Centre of Excellence in Commercialization and Research (CECR) funds and fast tracks the best drug discovery projects from across Canada and internationally to transform them into innovative therapeutic solutions through partnerships with the pharmaceutical industry and spin-off company creation.

IRICoR's recent \$25-million grant from the federal government, along with significant funding from Quebec, are instrumental in helping a number of initiatives to move forward – including the LeadAction-Onco competition.

Created in February 2017, the Oncopole is the product of a unique co-creation process led by the Fonds de recherche du Québec - Santé (FRQS) and made possible by an initial \$15-million investment from Merck Canada.

The Oncopole's mission is to act as a catalyst, leveraging actions of key players in Quebec's oncology and innovation research ecosystem. The Oncopole is the province's hub for research, development and investment to accelerate the fight against cancer.

As a result, it aims to position the province as a leader in the field. Its priorities of action are: research, entrepreneurship, commercialization and integration of innovation, as well as clinical relevance. It was established to foster the mobilization of stakeholders, the discovery of innovative approaches to fight cancer and, ultimately, to generate a positive impact for the benefit of patients.

“The Oncopole aims to consolidate the Quebec cancer research ecosystem, and to highlight discoveries, in order to maximize clinical practices,” says Dr. Renaldo Battista, its Executive Director. “The LeadAction-Onco competition fits perfectly into Oncopole's innovative approach and is proof of a very productive synergy with the various players in the field of life sciences. This investment enables the Oncopole to energize the transfer process from research to commercialization, thus creating value that is in tune with its mission.”

The goal of this competition is to accelerate the introduction of new products and technologies and move them into the clinic. IRICoR has successfully done this in the past and will continue.

“In the last 10 years, seven clinical trials were initiated from our portfolio projects, a number through partnerships with the industry and others through spin-off companies we have helped create,” explains Nadine Beauger, IRICoR's Chief Executive Officer. “It only took seven years to go from IRICoR's first investment in a stem cell expansion project initiated at

University of Montreal's Institute for Research in Immunology and Cancer to the creation of ExCellThera, one of our spin-off companies, currently in clinical stage.”

The process is indicative of how IRICoR will work with the winners of the LeadAction-Onco competition, as they research potential new therapies with the goal of bringing them into the market to benefit patients at an expedited pace.

Four up-and-coming innovators were recognized by the LeadAction-Onco competition with its announcement in June 2019, following a comprehensive evaluation of submissions from Quebec and the rest of Canada through an independent international peer review process. The winners will receive a global amount of \$2.4-million over two years in support of their flagship cancer drug discovery projects.

The research teams will benefit from the Oncopole's key positioning and IRICoR's signature support. “We do business in innovative ways,” notes Nadine Beauger, “by working hand-in-hand with researchers and bringing funding, drug discovery and business expertise to transform their research into therapeutic solutions, while developing a growing pool of business-savvy scientific talent.”

“The LeadAction-Onco competition is an exceptional opportunity to support creative projects that ensure the development of new treatments for people with cancer,” says Pierre Fitzgibbon, Minister of Economy and Innovation, whose ministry is one of the leading financiers of the project. “This competition also helps Quebec attract foreign investments that generate significant spin-offs for our life sciences industry.”

## Milestones and successes

### IRICoR

- More than 80 projects financed
- Over 50 projects in partnership
- Seven clinical trials
- 24 licensing deals with industry leaders
- 3 active spin-offs: 2 at clinical stage and 1 generating revenues
- \$50-million in foreign investment secured for R&D and operational funding

### Oncopole

- 6 competitions launched to support cancer research
- 17 projects funded to advance science in oncology

- 19 training grants awarded for the next generation of scientists
- Contributed to putting oncology research in Quebec on the map
- More than 30 projects financed and training grants for a total investment of nearly \$26-million

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