65LAB and Duke-NUS award US$1.85 million to combat chronic inflammation

SINGAPORE, July 29, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- • Recipient Associate Professor Lena Ho spearheads groundbreaking research to develop first- in-class therapeutics to target inflammatory diseases

• Collaboration between 65LAB and Duke-NUS aims to advance promising innovation from academic institutions with potential to build new therapeutic companies from Singapore

• US$1.85 million funding comprises US$1.5 million from 65LAB and US$350,000 from Duke-NUS' newly established incubator, LIVE Ventures

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> *Associate Professor Christopher Laing*

Associate Professor Lena Ho from Duke-NUS Medical School has been awarded US$1.85 million (approx. S$2.51 million) to further her team's research in developing microproteins into therapeutic targets to treat chronic inflammation. She is the first scientist to receive funding from 65LAB, a unique partnership set up to drive scientific advancement and create new biotech ventures from Singapore. The award comprises US$1.5 million from 65LAB, and S$500,000 (approx. US$350,000) from Duke-NUS' new incubator, LIVE Ventures.

Chronic inflammatory diseases and related syndromes affect close to 60 million people in the US alone, costing at least US$90 billion a year(1). In Singapore, the prevalence of these conditions is also on the rise. For example, rheumatoid arthritis affects about 45,000 people or around 1 per cent(2) of Singapore's population, and the incidence of paediatric inflammatory bowel disease has increased significantly over recent decades(3).

Associate Professor Lena Ho from Duke-NUS Cardiovascular and Metabolic Disorders Programme, said:

"We are developing a platform that uniquely positions us to uncover hidden gems in the human genome to provide novel and high-value targets for anti-inflammatory therapeutics within the first two years of the project. 65LAB's award and the additional funding from LIVE Ventures will enable my team to focus on identifying novel biologically active microproteins, offering promising candidates for inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel diseases and atopic dermatitis."

Investment represents first award for both new ventures

This award, which marks the first investment by 65LAB, is strengthened by the contribution of an additional US$350,000 by LIVE Ventures, an early-stage venture incubator newly launched by Duke-NUS.

65LAB brings together the resources and expertise of a consortium of global investors including ClavystBio, Leaps by Bayer, Lightstone Ventures, Polaris Partners and the Polaris Innovation Fund, and global life science company Evotec SE.

Assoc Prof Ho's project received unanimous support from 65LAB's investors and partners. It was selected following a competitive process where Assoc Prof Ho worked closely with 65LAB Expert-in-Residence Stephen Hess to develop a work plan that meets industry benchmarks, and positions her project towards commercialisation.

Adam Stoten, Joint Steering Committee Chair at 65LAB and Senior Vice President Academic Partnerships at Evotec, said:
"Assoc Prof Ho's project stands out for its first-in-class innovation and robust commercial strategy, offering significant potential for company creation. It is an exciting first step in 65LAB's mission to nurture promising scientific endeavours, evaluate them for further investment, and ultimately advance them into new therapeutic companies in Singapore."

65LAB was established to foster collaborations with leading academic and R&D institutions in Singapore such as Duke-NUS, providing critical resources and industry expertise to drive drug discovery and venture creation.

Aiming to provide vital funding for early-stage innovation, LIVE Ventures will award high-impact research projects from Duke-NUS scientists with up to half a million Singapore dollars each, empowering Duke-NUS scientists to advance their groundbreaking research to the market by providing crucial funding support and critical expertise and resource.

Associate Professor Christopher Laing, Vice-Dean for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Duke-NUS, said:
"As an innovation-driven research powerhouse, Duke-NUS is committed to enabling our scientists to translate their cutting-edge research into real-world solutions. To achieve this, we work closely with partners including 65LAB to cultivate an innovation ecosystem that not only combines the scientific expertise and industry resources but also the critical funding needed to advance laboratory discoveries to clinics."

"Cognisant of the importance of funding support for early-stage research projects to become commercially viable, we recently launched LIVE Ventures, an incubator which will fund high-potential research projects by our scientists, driving bench-to-bedside innovations at Duke-

NUS.”

The awards from 65LAB and LIVE Ventures underscore the potential of Assoc Prof Ho’s innovative research and highlight the necessity of close partnerships between academic institutions and industry partners in accelerating commercialisation to address critical health challenges and advancing new therapeutic solutions from Singapore for patients globally.

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3. Landscape of inflammatory bowel disease in Singapore. Intest Res. 2022 Jul; 20(3): 291–296. Doi: 10.5217/ir.2021.00089

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