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Pfizer gives \$1 million to B.C. researchers

Investment will launch fund to get newly discovered drugs from the lab bench to the patient's bedside faster

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Pfizer Canada announced a \$1-million investment today in British Columbia's Centre for Drug Research and Development to launch a fund aimed at accelerating the progress of drug discoveries from the lab bench to the patient's bedside.

The announcement marked the opening of BioPartnering North America, which runs today through Wednesday and showcases the work of 78 life sciences companies.

The money will be administered by the review panel of the CDRD and Pfizer and will be aimed at helping researchers overcome the costly gap between discovery and commercialization, a gap often dubbed the "valley of death" because it can be so difficult to overcome.

"This is an extremely good sign for British Columbia," said Natalie Dakers, chief executive officer for the Centre for Drug Research and Development, which is based at the University of B.C. "Pfizer is the first big pharma to invest these kinds of substantial funds in the CDRD.

"We are seen as Canada's research accelerator and this is a big step forward for the CDRD."

Dr. Bernard Prigent, vice-president and medical director for Pfizer Canada, said the \$1 million is just a first step.

"There is a global realization that the best way for everyone in the end to make progress and to bring science to patients is to have a more systematic way of bridging the gap between academic research and the private sector," he said.

"I think CDRD is well-positioned to do that in British Columbia."

The CDRD has \$50 million in provincial and federal government funding and is focused on helping life sciences innovation transform from the discovery stage to commercialization and approved products.

"Ultimately our goal is to continue to build our industry," said Dakers. "We have excellent science in B.C.; we have been able to show we can translate that into robust companies.

"We see this private/public partnership as a critical part of our success."

Marking its sixth year, BioPartnering North America is co-hosted by Life Sciences British Columbia, BIOTEC Canada and BioAlberta. It is expected to draw more than 900 participants from 400 companies with 78 companies presenting.

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