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Lifespan, Brown University, Care New England, University of Rhode Island, and Providence VA Medical Center Forge Neuroscience Research Agreement

New collaboration unites distinct strengths, creates critical mass to attract research funding

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Rhode Island’s most prominent research institutions engaged in brain science announced that they have entered into a formal agreement to work jointly toward helping solve some of the many mysteries of the brain. The partnership with Lifespan, Brown University, University of Rhode Island, Care New England and Providence VA Medical Center is focused on identifying the causes as well as treatments for a wide-range of diseases and disorders, such as Alzheimer’s disease, epilepsy, stroke, traumatic brain injury and autism.

“Neuroscience is the next, great frontier in medicine and within that expanse lies some of the most vexing and devastating neurological disorders of our time. Clearly, Rhode Island’s world-class brain researchers are up for tackling the challenge,” said Timothy J. Babineau, president and CEO of Lifespan. “Just as with cardiac disease and cancer, true breakthroughs in diagnosis and treatment occur only when there is collaboration among and between disciplines and institutions. This agreement presents just such a collaborative opportunity.”

Babineau added that all five of the institutions jumped at the opportunity to work together and were eager to sign a memorandum of understanding to formalize the partnership.

“As we work to crack the code of brain sciences, teamwork is more important than ever to find solutions to keep people healthy,” said Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo. “Sharing information and research across our university and health care partners will lead to valuable treatments to improve the quality of life of so many people. Combining our existing neuroscience expertise will also take our research capabilities to the next level, and put Rhode Island on the map as a place of innovation and collaboration.”

Rhode Island is the only state in the country to have such a statewide effort of all the major institutions involved in this field.

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Leaders from the institutions are confident that collaboration will result in larger, more comprehensive research projects, with institutions leveraging each other's neuroscience work, which includes:

- Lifespan's Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute
- The Brown Institute for Brain Science (BIBS)
- URI's George and Anne Ryan Institute for Neuroscience
- The Providence VA Medical Center's Center of Excellence for Neurorestoration and Neurotechnology
- Care New England's psychiatry research at Butler Hospital and autism work at Women & Infants Hospital

Rhode Island's federal delegation expressed their support for the collaboration, seeing it as a critical scientific and economic boost to the state.

"We are committed to ensuring Rhode Island is a national leader in neuroscience research and our Veterans have access to cutting-edge care. This MOU will allow these institutions to leverage their strengths and resources to enhance their research capabilities and ultimately improve care for patients," said U.S. Sens. Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and U.S. Reps. Jim Langevin and David Cicilline in a joint statement from the state's Congressional delegation.

The institutions' researchers are excited about potential benefits that include co-funding pilot grant programs, cross-institutional appointments, educational opportunities for researchers and staff, and the sharing of information, equipment and facilities.

"At Brown, we believe that this new level of partnership stands to improve our ability to attract more funding, and the best faculty and students," Brown University President Christina Paxson said. "It will accelerate the pace at which we can do research and magnify the reach of our teaching and the diversity of ideas in our classrooms. The challenges of mental health and brain disease in Rhode Island and the world demand not just that we make progress, but that we make a real, positive difference in the lives of people."

Former chairman and CEO of CVS Health Thomas M. Ryan, who with his wife, Cathy, established the George and Anne Ryan Institute for Neuroscience at URI, applauded the collaboration. "We have hospitals and higher education institutions that have taken the initiative and understand that collectively they can make a difference in peoples' lives. This MOU positions Rhode Island as potentially a global leader in neuroscience, capable of developing breakthroughs and discovering cures for these debilitating diseases," said Ryan.

University of Rhode Island President Dr. David M. Dooley added, "This MOU involves all of the entities in the state that can bring assets to bear on solving important and critical problems that have such personal effects on so many people."

Dr. Susan MacKenzie, director of the Providence VA Medical Center, spoke to the collaboration's ultimate goal of discovering better treatments for patients. "This agreement will help develop cutting-edge therapies and technologies for Veterans with neurological and mental health disorders. We're excited to be a partner in this collaboration," she said.

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Dennis Keefe, president and chief executive officer of Care New England, added, “Partnerships like this underscore the great potential for collaboration across our state, putting Rhode Island on the map for the incomparable skills, expertise and knowledge in the important area of brain science. This memorandum of understanding will enable all of our investigators to work together more formally on brain science activities that will benefit generations to come.”

Part of the MOU is the creation of the Committee on Coordination on Neuroscience Research within Rhode Island, which will spearhead the inter-institutional initiatives envisioned. Members of this committee are: Diane Lipscombe, Ph.D., and R. John Davenport, Ph.D., from Brown University; John Robson, Ph.D., and Ziya Gokaslan, M.D., from Lifespan; Lawrence Price, M.D., and Steven Rasmussen, M.D., from Care New England; Paula Grammas, Ph.D, and William Renehan, Ph.D., from the University of Rhode Island; and Leigh Hochberg, M.D., Ph.D., and Benjamin D. Greenberg, M.D., Ph.D. from the VA Medical Center.

To schedule an interview with committee members or institution leadership, please contact:

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