



Merck Canada and MaRS Team Up to Launch Lung Cancer Innovation Challenge

Challenge aimed at improving patient outcomes by identifying solutions to reduce time between diagnosis and treatment for lung cancer patients

KIRKLAND, QC, January 20, 2021 – Merck Canada and MaRS Discovery District (MaRS) are proud to launch the [Lung Cancer Innovation Challenge](#). The competition challenges Ontario-based innovators to identify, implement and scale solutions that can enhance an Ontario lung cancer patient's journey by seeking to reduce the length of time between diagnosis and treatment for lung cancer patients, and enable improved treatment outcomes, especially for priority patient groups such as rural and lower socioeconomic populations in Ontario. Financial prizes will be awarded to the winners of the challenge. In addition, the winners may have the opportunity to collaborate on future projects with Merck Canada. Of the four most common cancers, lung cancer, has the lowest survival rate, regardless of stage at diagnosis.¹ It is estimated that 29,800 new lung cancer cases would be diagnosed in 2020 across Canada, with almost 40 per cent of those cases residing in Ontario alone.^{2,3} The ability for lung cancer patients to receive initial access to primary care and the proper treatment at the right time is dependent upon a number of different factors that touch on the patient, their circle of care, and the broader health system.

“We play an important role within Canada’s healthcare environment, and we are very committed to helping solve key issues which patients are facing today. Our Life sciences sector is one of the most innovative sectors imaginable and is key to tackling some of society’s biggest health challenges. Innovative partnerships and joint initiatives, like this one with MaRS, are allowing us to collaborate and to tap into some of Ontario’s brightest minds in order to bring new, invaluable solutions to people facing cancer,” says AnnA Van Acker, President and Managing Director of Merck Canada. “The majority of lung cancer cases are diagnosed at Stage 4 and the disease often rapidly progresses to a point where appropriate treatment is no longer an option. The Lung Cancer Innovation Challenge provides an exciting opportunity to go above and beyond and to find much needed ways to help shorten the time gap between diagnosis and treatment, thereby potentially improving patient outcomes, individually and collectively.”

The challenge kicks off today, January 20, with a virtual launch event at 11 a.m. EST featuring a panel discussion on the barriers and opportunities associated with the diagnosis and treatment of lung cancer. Panelists representing a diverse range of perspectives across the healthcare system — including patients, healthcare providers and other innovators — will share their experiences and speak to the additional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Fighting lung cancer during a pandemic means reduced access to primary care, diagnosis and screening. It’s also a very lonely process with tightened restrictions on visitor policies,” says Alex Ryan, SVP, Partner Solutions at MaRS. “By partnering with Merck Canada, we will help foster innovative solutions that diffuse some of the COVID-19 complexities lung cancer patients encounter while strengthening and building long-term resiliency in Ontario’s health care system.”

“I’d like to congratulate Merck Canada and MaRS on the launch of this joint initiative,” said Nina Tangri, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade. “Now more than ever, we need innovation and new ideas to better our healthcare system. I look forward to seeing the novel and life-changing solutions that Ontario’s innovators submit to the challenge to help patients and families.”

The challenge will run until March 25, 2021, and the grand-prize winner will receive a \$100,000 prize with \$50,000 going to the runner-up prize winner. Winners will be announced by April 28, 2021. Please go [here](#) for more information or to register for the launch event.

About Merck

For more than 125 years, Merck, known as MSD outside of the United States and Canada, has been inventing for life, bringing forward medicines and vaccines for many of the world’s most challenging diseases in pursuit of our mission to save and improve lives. We demonstrate our commitment to patients and population health by increasing access to health care through far-reaching policies, programs and partnerships. Today, Merck continues to be at the forefront of research to prevent and treat diseases that threaten people and animals – including cancer, infectious diseases such as HIV and Ebola, and emerging animal diseases – as we aspire to be the premier research-intensive biopharmaceutical company in the world.

About MaRS

MaRS is North America’s largest urban innovation hub. A registered non-profit, MaRS supports high-growth startups and scale-ups tackling key issues in health, cleantech, fintech and other sectors. In addition, MaRS convenes all members of the tech ecosystem to drive breakthrough discoveries, grow the economy and make an impact by solving real problems for real people — in Canada and around the world.

For further information: Merck Canada Media Relations, 1-800-463-7251 or mediacanada@merck.com, MaRS Media Relations, media@marsdd.com

References

¹ Ontario Cancer Statistics 2018 — Cancer Care Ontario

² Ontario Cancer Statistics 2018 — Cancer Care Ontario

³ Target Wait Times for Cancer Surgery in Ontario, 2016 — Cancer Care Ontario