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Autism Genome Project

Status	Current
Competition	III
Sector	Health
Genome Centre	Ontario Genomics Institute
Project Leader	Stephen Scherer

Project Description

Autism, a severe neurodevelopmental disorder affecting thousands of Canadians, is characterized by impairments in social- communication and by a preference for repetitive activities. Although it is generally agreed that a strong genetic basis underlies the condition, the causes of autism are still unknown. According to Dr. Stephen Scherer, senior scientist in the Department of Genetics and Genomic Biology at SickKids Hospital, it will be extremely valuable to characterize the human genome in search of autism susceptibility genes, and the mechanisms governing their action.

Dr. Scherer is project leader of the Autism Genome Project, an unprecedented initiative bringing together many of the leading geneticists, clinicians and genome scientists undertaking autism research in Canada, and linking to 170 other scientists from 10 other countries world wide.

This project will screen the genomes from over 6000 members of 1600 families to find where susceptibility genes reside along the chromosomes. Advanced genomic methods will then be used to assess the DNA in these chromosome regions in order to identify disease-associated genes.

This project will incorporate genetic information about autism into health care delivery and policy development, and eventually lead to new and more accurate diagnostic tests.