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Gairdner prize for Lewis Kay underlines importance of support for fundamental science

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OTTAWA, March 30, 2017 – The board of the Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences (CSMB) would like to congratulate Canada Gairdner International Award laureate Dr. Lewis Kay on receiving this most prestigious award. Dr. Kay is an international leader in structural biology who has pushed the limits of nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy beyond anything else in the field. His work beautifully illustrates the essential role of fundamental, investigator-driven research in the spectrum of science and innovation. For 25 years Dr. Kay has developed unique aspects of NMR that have resulted in new paradigms for visualizing subtle yet critical protein motion and for observing the functional architecture of gigantic multi-protein complexes such as the 20S proteasome. While Dr. Kay has published over 400 peer-reviewed papers, his is not the sort of work that has typically made headlines since its applicability was not immediately apparent. However, we do now know that the results of his fundamental research will have direct impact on the development of cures for many diseases such as cancer. Indeed, because of the many insights gained from Dr. Kay's ground-breaking discovery research, the 20S proteasome is now a vital target for the development of new chemotherapeutic drugs

Dr. Kay's work would not have been possible without long-standing support for curiosity-driven fundamental science by agencies such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) of Canada and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI). In thanking the Gairdner foundation at the announcement ceremony, Dr. Kay recognized this saying that he was grateful that his work over the past 25 years took place in an atmosphere where "there was still room for discovery".

Without new investments in CIHR and NSERC discovery research Canada is at risk, and we may lose the next generation of innovators and Gairdner winners. We urge the federal government to follow the lead of the Quebec government that has substantially strengthened support for the province's Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ), the equivalent to the federal tricouncil agencies, in its 2017 budget. Fundamental discovery research is at the basis of all future innovations, and is critical to the future of our country. Therefore, the 2018 federal budget should be Canada's science budget outlining a long-term plan for sustainable reinvestments into fundamental discovery research and training of the next generation of scientists and innovators supported by the federal tricouncil agencies.

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About The Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences (CSMB):

The Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences (CSMB) represents thousands of the country's leading biosciences faculty members and students. In addition to our annual scientific meetings and events for trainees, CSMB advocates for robust and integrated funding of discovery research in Canada. To learn more about CSMB's initiatives, visit

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