



# media release

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

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## **High-powered genetics roundtable in Wellington**

Leading thinkers in the field of genetics from both sides of the Tasman will gather in Wellington later this month for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australia-New Zealand Roundtable on Genomics on Tuesday 24 November 2009.

They will examine how genomic knowledge is produced through research, how it is used at the bedside in the clinical situation, and what sorts of parameters and safeguards are needed for using genomic knowledge.

The gathering is a follow-up from the first Australia-New Zealand roundtable on genomics, held in November last year, which brought together distinguished, leading thinkers from both countries to discuss the legal, ethical and policy gaps created by the rapid expansion of genetic knowledge and technology.

Both countries have produced significant research in the field, through the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) reports on the protection of human genetic information and gene patents and with the recent *Genes, Society and the Future* reports from the New Zealand Law Foundation-sponsored Human Genome Research Project (HGRP) led by the University of Otago's Faculty of Law.

Professor Mark Henaghan, Otago Law Faculty Dean and leader of the HGRP says the first round-table proved to be an extremely valuable exercise.

“Both countries recognise that we can work together more to take a joint approach to addressing the changes that are needed to genetic research and clinical practices, ethical guidelines, and the law.

“Once again we have brought together top clinical, ethical and legal minds to work through these issues with a view to providing important policy recommendations.”

The roundtable will be chaired and facilitated by New Zealand Court of Appeal judge, Justice Bruce Robertson, and two of the key sessions will be chaired by Professor Ron Trent, the Professor of Modern Molecular Genetics at the University of Sydney, and Professor Ingrid Winship, Chair of Adult Clinical Genetics at the University of Melbourne and Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Attorney General Chris Finlayson will deliver the keynote address.

Each of the first two sessions will be addressed by leading genetic researchers and clinicians who will address issues dealing with taking genetic knowledge out of the laboratory and into real-world application in the clinic.

This will include examining how to communicate accurate knowledge of new advances to the public, and the benefits and pitfalls to individuals of having greater knowledge of their personal genomics.

The day's third and final session will then allow for discussion of medical, ethical, cultural and legal issues raised by the earlier two sessions, and focus on what sorts of parameters and safeguards are needed.

The roundtable is an initiative of the New Zealand Law Foundation-sponsored Human Genome Research Project.

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**Background**

The Australia-New Zealand Roundtable on Genomics is spearheaded by the Human Genome Research Project, funded by the New Zealand Law Foundation.

**The New Zealand Law Foundation-sponsored Human Genome Research Project**

The Human Genome Research Project is an initiative of the New Zealand Law Foundation and is a multidisciplinary and international project examining whether, how, and to what extent, human genome-based technologies should be regulated.

The Foundation decided to establish the project after identifying the relative absence of medical, ethical, legal and cultural analyses and debates in New Zealand around the rapidly emerging issues from human genetic technologies. The Otago Law Faculty was selected in 2002 to lead a multidisciplinary research team involving international collaborators.

[www.otago.ac.nz/law/genome](http://www.otago.ac.nz/law/genome)

### **The New Zealand Law Foundation**

The Foundation is an independent charitable trust that provides grants for legal research and public education on legal matters. As such, it is the only funder of 'pure' legal research in New Zealand – other legal research funding is tied to public policy development.

In addition to its grants programme, the Foundation also awards annually the International Research Fellowship, New Zealand's premier legal research award.

[www.lawfoundation.org.nz](http://www.lawfoundation.org.nz)