

Health Policy Briefing

Terry Fox's legacy inspires federal government to pledge \$150-million to create Marathon of Hope Cancer Centres Network

The \$150-million pledge is the largest commitment to health research in the federal budget.



Liberal MP Pam Damoff

Opinion

"I've said it to people before that I'm going to do my very best to make it; I'm not going to give up. But I might not make it...if I don't, the Marathon of Hope better continue."Terry Fox

On April 16, 2016, Dr. Victor Ling, president and scientific director of the Terry Fox Research Institute, walked in to my office in Ottawa with a dream—the Marathon of Hope Cancer Centres. After he explained the concept to me and asked if the federal government would support the project, I said, "Well, it won't be easy." He just smiled and said, "What Terry did wasn't easy either. But we need to dream and together we can do this."

That dream will now become a reality. In the three years since Dr. Ling first shared his vision with me, we held a reception for Parliamentarians on the Hill, talked to ministers and officials and, most

importantly—Terry Foxers across Canada, met with their Members of Parliament last summer to say, "there is a vision to cure cancer, and we need your support."

On March 18, 2019, Finance Minister Bill Morneau tabled the budget in the House of Commons and said, "To help give more cancer patients and their families help and hope, we will provide the Terry Fox Research Institute with up to \$150-million to establish a national Marathon of Hope Cancer Centres network." I broke down in tears when I heard those words, knowing that this federal investment could be leveraged with matching funds to make this transformative vision a reality.

Inspired by the legacy of Terry Fox, the Terry Fox Research Institute and partners launched the new national network to bring together, for the first time, leading cancer hospitals and research universities across Canada to accelerate precision medicine for cancer patients.

The announcement was made in St. John's, N.L., at Mile Marker 0 on the same day and at the exact spot where Terry Fox began his Marathon of Hope on April 12, 1980. Thirty-nine years later, we are one step closer to realizing Terry's dream. At the announcement in St. John's, Dr. Ling told the crowd, "We are at the start of a moment. We are creating the Team Canada of cancer research."

When it's fully operational, the network will bring cancer research institutions from across British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, the Prairies, and Atlantic Canada together to ensure patients across Canada have access to the same treatment protocols regardless of where they live. In the network, research teams from coast to coast will share data, harmonize resources and apply new technologies such as genomics, advanced imaging and artificial intelligence,

so that no matter where they live in Canada, cancer patients will have access to precision medicine—so the right treatment can be given to the right patient at the right time.

I am thrilled that the \$150-million pledge is the largest commitment to health research in the federal budget. This is a transformational investment in cancer research that brings us one step closer to ending cancer. It will be matched with funds raised by the network partners, their foundations and the Terry Fox Foundation. Thanks to funding from the Terry Fox Research Institute and regional partners, pilot projects for precision medicine are already underway in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec.

In 2017, approximately 206,200 Canadians were diagnosed with cancer and approximately 80,800 Canadians died from cancer. Every year, Terry Fox Runs are held in more than 9,000 communities across Canada and around the world to raise funds for cancer research in an effort to change those numbers. To date, more than \$750-million has been raised worldwide in Terry's name. The Terry Fox Foundation works directly with the Terry Fox Research Institute to strive for the best outcomes for cancer patients. Before he died, Terry said, "I want to try the impossible to show that it can be done. I believe in miracles—I have to." This new network of excellence will try the impossible every day, in research labs, hospitals and institutes across Canada to realize the miracle Terry dreamed of when he set off from St. John's 39 years ago—a cure for cancer.

Liberal MP Pam Damoff, who represents Oakville North-Burlington, Ont., is parliamentary secretary to the minister of health. She is also chair of the Oakville Terry Fox Run..

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