**Press Release**

**LDC and the University of Duisburg-Essen receive EUR 905,000 for the development of new therapies for age-related blindness**

Dortmund, December 13, 2018 – The Lead Discovery Center GmbH (LDC) and the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) have received EUR 905,000 in funding from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia as part of its lead market competition, LifeSciences.NRW. Together with the LDC’s own financial contribution, this gives the partners a total of EUR 1.3 million with which to develop new drugs for the treatment of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

AMD is the most common form of blindness. In Germany alone, approximately 6.9 million people are affected, 480,000 of them at an advanced stage of the disease. There is no satisfactory therapy to date.

New research has shown that AMD patients frequently have a high level of a particular enzyme, HTRA1-protease. This leads to an increased breakdown of proteins, resulting in damage to the macula, which is crucial for sight. The joint development project builds on research by Prof. Dr Ehrmann and his team at the UDE that suggests targeted inhibition of HTRA1 is a promising new approach to preventing the progression of the disease.

In an initial collaborative project, also supported by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the LDC and the UDE have already identified a series of chemical substances that specifically inhibit HTRA1. In the current follow-on project, the partners will be optimizing and validating these substances. Their goal is to develop a well-characterized lead structure that meets all the requirements of a therapeutic agent and demonstrates efficacy in an *in-vivo* model system.

To this end, the LDC and Prof. Dr Ehrmann and his team will be working closely with two further research groups at the UDE. Prof. Kaiser and his colleagues will contribute their extensive knowledge of protease inhibitors, and Prof. Dr Sanchez Garcia’s group provides longstanding experience in the computation and stimulation of biomolecules and biochemical processes. The LDC is coordinating the project, and contributes the competencies required for professional drug development, above all in the areas of medicinal chemistry and pharmacology. “This cooperation is a fantastic chance to develop results from basic research to benefit patients,” says Prof. Ehrmann. “In view of the aging world-wide population, we urgently need better drugs for the treatment of AMD.”

“We are delighted to be working together with this terrific and proven team,” adds Dr Bert Klebl, CEO of the LDC. “The project will profit enormously from their competence and experience. Together we can reach a stage of development that will be highly attractive to industry partners, enabling subsequent transfer to clinical development.”

The joint development project will run for 3 years und is supported by the European Regional Development Fund.



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**About the LDC**

The Lead Discovery Center (LDC) was established in 2008 by the technology transfer organization Max Planck Innovation, as a novel approach to capitalize on the potential of excellent basic research for the discovery of new therapies for diseases with high medical need.

The LDC takes on promising early-stage projects from academia and transforms them into innovative pharmaceutical leads that reach initial proof-of-concept in animals. In close collaboration with high-profile partners from academia and industry, the LDC is building a strong and growing portfolio of small molecule leads with exceptional medical and commercial potential.

The LDC sustains a preferred partnership with the Max Planck Society and has formed alliances with AstraZeneca, Apeiron, Bayer, Boehringer Ingelheim, Daiichi Sankyo, Grünenthal, Johnson & Johnson Innovation, Merck KGaA, Qurient and Sotio as well as various investors and leading translational drug discovery centres around the globe.

Further information at: [www.lead-discovery.de](http://www.lead-discovery.de)

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