

## Stem Cell Research in California: Lessons Learned

In November 2004, California voters approved Proposition 71, authorizing three billion dollars of public funds for stem cell research.

The stem cell program has been mired in controversy from the start, and is still largely stalled. Increasingly, public interest groups and state legislators who support embryonic stem cell research are scrutinizing the serious flaws in the initiative, and criticizing the way it is being implemented by the new California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM).

Proposition 71 gives control over a huge amount of public funds for research to a set of interested parties insulated from public accountability. Since the election, numerous actions by CIRM's leadership have deepened these concerns.

### **Inadequate standards of governance**

Proposition 71 vested control of \$3 billion of public funds in CIRM's governing body, the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC), but explicitly exempted CIRM from oversight by elected officials. It also exempts CIRM from many provisions of California's open meeting and conflict of interest laws, and its stem cell research activities from "any other current or future state laws or regulations."

### **Conflicts of interest**

CIRM's governing board is dominated by representatives of institutions and groups who are likely to benefit from the public funds it controls, either as direct recipients of its grants or as entrepreneurs. It includes no representatives of broader public interest constituencies, such as public health, women's health, or consumer protection advocates.

The ICOC's built-in conflicts are exacerbated by the financial interests of several individuals on the board who have investments or leadership positions in companies involved in stem cell research or its commercialization. Moreover, the members of CIRM's influential advisory groups are not required to publicly disclose their financial interests—leaving Californians in the dark.

### **Lack of protection for research subjects and egg providers**

Proposition 71 allows CIRM to set its own standards for protecting research subjects. This is of particular concern because pressures for early clinical trials are likely, and because the law prioritizes a stem cell technique (known as somatic cell nuclear transfer or research cloning) that requires many human eggs—and thus many women to provide them. These women will be the first research subjects of CIRM's funded investigations, and the ICOC's guidelines for egg extraction fall short in a number of key areas.

### **Lack of safeguards against dangerous technologies**

Proposition 71 endorses and prioritizes research cloning, but provides no meaningful regulation to mitigate the potential for misuse of cloned embryos in unauthorized efforts to produce cloned or genetically modified children.

*For more information, please visit our website at [www.geneticsandsociety.org](http://www.geneticsandsociety.org) or call us at (510) 625-0819.*

