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- [Home](#)
- [AgBiotech](#)
- [Biomedical](#)
- [Bioinformatics](#)

LATEST

- [News](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Market](#)
- [Reports](#)

TOPIC

CENTRES

- [Cloning](#)
- [Drugs](#)
- [Genetics](#)
- [Genome](#)
- [IPO](#)
- [Proteome](#)
- [Regulation](#)

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- [Subscriptions](#)
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Biotech startup Epichem opens for business

MELISSA TRUDINGER, AUSTRALIAN BIOTECHNOLOGY NEWS

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State of the art medicinal chemistry facilities were opened on the Murdoch University campus by the WA Minister for Development Clive Brown last week for biotech start up Epichem.

The company, which is 80 per cent owned by listed company Echo Technologies (ASX: EHO), was established last year by a group of chemists formerly employed by the government's Chemistry Centre of WA to commercialise the contract services offered by the Medicinal and Biological Chemistry division.

"We're not an official spin-off of the Chemistry Centre, but most of our chemists come from there," said Dr Wayne Best, managing director of Epichem.

The new facility will allow rapid synthesis and purification of new drug compounds with revenues of almost AUD\$800,000 expected this calendar year.

The company is in advanced negotiations with several prominent multi-national drug discovery and pharmaceutical companies to provide contract synthesis and drug discovery services, Best said.

Epichem scientists are also working with researchers at Murdoch University's Parasitology Research Group, a World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre headed by Prof Andrew Thompson, to develop lead compounds for incurable parasitological diseases including African sleeping sickness. The collaboration has been the subject of a number of grants in the past few years, including an ARC Linkage grant.

"We have some very exciting leads so far in vitro, and we're just starting in vivo work," said Best.

Best said the location of the company on the Murdoch University campus not only provided opportunities for collaboration with biomedical scientists, but also access to specialised equipment and infrastructure including Murdoch's \$1 million NMR facility.

The university invested \$150,000 into the company's new facility, while Echo Technologies put \$350,000 into the company.

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