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Illinois set to lead stem cell science

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With the Illinois House's approval last week of embryonic stem cell research, the state is poised to join California on the cutting edge of work in this crucial area. The vote followed the state Senate's approval of a bill to establish a permanent program for issuing and administering stem cell research grants to hospitals and research facilities (and to outlaw reproductive cloning).

Social conservatives oppose stem cell research because it involves discarding embryos, but a clear majority of the public supports it, recognizing its dramatic potential for treating and curing juvenile diabetes, Alzheimer's and other diseases while noting that hundreds of embryos are destroyed by fertility clinics each year without comment. Lifting restrictions from researchers is a crucial step. So is ensuring this work continues into the future.

Last year, Gov. Blagojevich and Illinois comptroller Dan Hynes announced 10 grants totalling \$15 million for stem cell research. To ensure a long-term commitment, Rep. Tom Cross (R-Oswego) recently introduced a bill to direct \$25 million from the state's tobacco settlement money to stem cell research in each of the next four years. Hynes has advocated that measure as well. "The prospect of medical miracles lies ahead for all of us," he said in a letter to the Sun-Times. That's great news for a lot of Illinoisans.