

Media Backgrounder

International AIDS Society

Towards an HIV Cure: A Global Scientific Strategy

International AIDS Society Policy and an HIV Cure

In 2010, the International AIDS Society (IAS), with the support of the National Institutes of Health, the French Agence Nationale de Recherche sur le SIDA (ANRS), the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, Sidaction, and the Treatment Action Group, organized a workshop on HIV Reservoirs in conjunction with the XVIII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2010) in Vienna, Austria.

Following the success of the workshop and in light of the resurgence of interest and optimism on prospects of a cure for HIV - be it a functional or sterilizing cure – the IAS has engaged in dialogue with a number of stakeholders in the field (researchers, activists, industry, funders). With the support of its partners, the IAS is committed to seizing the momentum and demonstrating leadership in advocating for increased investment in HIV cure research and more concerted efforts to advance the science.

The IAS has undertaken to guide the development of a Global Scientific Strategy, *Towards an HIV Cure*, with the hope that it will contribute to the establishment of an international research alliance and/or expansion and global collaboration of existing consortia towards an HIV cure. In line with the IAS's 2010-2014 strategy, the IAS Governing Council prioritized an HIV cure as one of its four key policy areas in November 2010. The IAS Governing Council has since reaffirmed that HIV cure is a priority for 2012.

Scientific research has led to remarkable discoveries since HIV was first identified thirty years ago. Today, individuals living with HIV can expect to live a relatively normal lifespan. In addition to the individual benefits, recent scientific evidence has brought concrete proof that optimal ART can prevent HIV transmission at the population level through viral suppression in HIV infected patients.

Combination antiretroviral treatment has radically changed the face of HIV infection, from a lethal disease into a chronic condition. Nevertheless, antiretroviral regimens are indeed costly and tiring for patients with severe side-effects.

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Moreover, given the current economic situation the life-long sustainability of treatment roll-out is threatened.

While funds directed towards the search for an HIV Cure must always be additional to existing treatment funding it is clear too it also need to be factored in that combination therapy — even when given for decades — is not curative given that HIV persists even in efficiently treated patients.

The search for an HIV Cure is a humanitarian imperative both in terms of the individual and public health benefits it would provide and also an opportunity to potentially avoid the long-term cumulative costs of ART.

The foundation of the global scientific strategy, developed under the auspices of the IAS, is that of leading scientists in the field developing a consensus on state of the art HIV cure research. The strategy hopes to contribute to maximizing resources and strategic investment in the most promising strategies geared to searching for a functional or sterilizing cure.

Evolution of the Global Scientific Strategy

The development of the strategy involves a five-step approach:

Step 1 - An international researchers' working group¹, comprised of basic scientists and clinicians, developed the draft global scientific strategy in cooperation with a stakeholders' advisory board². The international working group is co-chaired by the IAS President-elect, Professor Françoise Barré-Sinoussi³, and Professor Steven Deeks from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). Dr. Jack Whitescarver, Director of the Office of AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health, who played a pivotal role in the Vienna workshop "Towards a Cure", is co-chair of the advisory board together with the IAS President-elect.

Step 2 - The draft strategy was circulated widely to stakeholders involved in the HIV/AIDS response between late 2011 and early 2012 to solicit their input and perspectives. Consultations on the draft strategy took place with scientists from

¹ List of Members Annexed - Contact IAS Media Officer for contact details for interviews

² List of Members Annexed - Contact IAS Media Officer for contact details for interviews

³ Biography and Picture Annexed

various disciplines (HIV and non-HIV), patient organizations, pharmaceutical companies, international organizations, and regulatory and research funding agencies. The consultations were held through face-to-face meetings and online surveys, as well as key informant interviews.

Step 3 – Following the consultation phase, it was apparent that ethical issues in the scientific strategy needed further development, and as such the IAS will create a Special Working Group on Ethics⁴ to develop specific recommendations on these issues to include in the strategy and also as a detailed appendix. It was also decided that the strategy should be complemented by a policy paper to highlight the expected benefits of an HIV cure and important measure to be taken for the roll-out of the strategy, aimed at non-researchers. The IAS will create a Special Working Group on Cost-Effectiveness⁵ to support the development of the policy paper. Parallel to this, the IAS will design an advocacy and communications strategy to pave the way for the roll-out of the scientific strategy outside of expert circles.

Step 4 - The strategy, “Towards an HIV Cure”, will be presented at a scientific symposium organized in advance of AIDS 2012 in Washington, D.C. The symposium will be structured in line with the scientific priorities defined in the Global Scientific Strategy. At AIDS 2012, sessions will be organized to report on the highlights of the symposium.

Step 5 – Once the strategy is developed, the IAS intends to monitor its implementation by encouraging the creation of international research alliances and the development of existing consortiums to work collaboratively on the priorities defined in the strategic plan. To facilitate collaboration, an international online platform will be created to share information, and a multi-year funding coordination plan will be developed. The IAS has also created an Industry Collaboration Group to foster the involvement of industry to develop a safe, accessible and scalable cure for HIV. In addition, the IAS is supporting the creation of a multinational academic and community-based research team to look into patient’s willingness to participate in HIV Cure trials and the potential impact of an HIV Cure from a social and behavioural sciences perspective.

⁴ List of Members Annexed - Contact IAS Media Officer for contact details for interviews.

⁵ List of Members Annexed - Contact IAS Media Officer for contact details for interviews.

List of International Working Group Members

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Frank	Maldarelli	NCI/NIH
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Guido	Silvestri	University of Pennsylvania
Javier	Martinez- Picado	irsiCaixa Foundation
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List of Advisory Board Members

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List of Special Working Group on Ethics Members

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