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New UN-backed report finds declining funding levels for HIV vaccine research



20 July 2009 – A new United Nations-backed report on investment in HIV prevention research in 2008 finds that funding levels for a possible vaccine for the virus have decreased for the first time since investment trends have been tracked.

The report – “Adapting to Realities: Trends in HIV Prevention Research Funding 2000 to 2008” – notes that this trend may have been influenced by shifts in scientific priorities, the global economic downturn and competition for various health issues.

Despite the decrease, the overall trend since 2000 has been of greater investment for experimental biomedical prevention strategies, adds the report, prepared by the HIV Vaccine and Microbicide Resource Tracking Working Group, of which the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS ([UNAIDS](#)) is a member.

It identifies investments of almost \$1.2 billion in HIV prevention research in 2008, of which \$868 million supported vaccine research and development (R&D), and \$244 million supported microbicide R&D.

The United States was once again the leader in funding HIV prevention research, supporting 71 per cent of HIV vaccine R&D and 63 per cent of microbicide R&D in 2008.

“A decrease in investment from the US National Institutes of Health contributed to the overall decline of funding for HIV vaccine R&D,” states a news release published by UNAIDS on the report.

In addition to the \$39 million decline in US investment, there was also a decrease in funding for HIV vaccine research from other countries, including from European governments, Brazil, Canada, India, South Africa and Thailand.

A recent report from UNAIDS and the World Bank warned that the well-being of millions of people could be put at risk as HIV prevention and treatment programmes fall victim to funding cutbacks as a result of the global economic crisis.

It found that eight countries – which together are home to more than 60 per cent of all those receiving AIDS treatment – are already facing shortages of antiretroviral drugs or other disruptions to treatment.

In addition, 34 out of the 71 surveyed countries report that HIV prevention programmes focusing on high-risk groups such as sex workers, injection drug users and men who have sex with men are already feeling the impact of the crisis.

Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS, said research to develop new HIV prevention tools and strategies is essential to prevent new infections, and an HIV vaccine still holds “the greatest hope” to ending the epidemic. “It is vitally important that investments into research for HIV prevention be sustained and increased for as long as it takes to reach those goals.”

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