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Science & Medicine | Researchers at Global HIV/AIDS Vaccine Conference Express Concerns About Funding Levels

[Oct 16, 2008]

Experts at the [AIDS Vaccine 2008](#) conference in Cape Town, South Africa, on Tuesday expressed concerns that the current global economic situation could damage funding for AIDS research and vaccine development, the [AP/Los Angeles Times](#) reports. The economic situation has "added to the gloom among experts deeply frustrated by ... setbacks" in HIV/AIDS vaccine research, according to the [AP/Times](#). There also are concerns that some groups that are large contributors to health and international development initiatives could reduce funding in light of the economic situation, the [AP/Times](#) reports.

Anthony Fauci, director of [NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#), said this year's NIH budget for HIV/AIDS vaccine research is \$491 million out of a total HIV/AIDS budget of \$1.5 billion. This compares with a \$115 million vaccine budget in 1998 out of a total budget of \$703 million. Although Fauci said that he does not expect the U.S. government to reduce its funding for HIV/AIDS, he added that the "increases in the budget that we had hoped for will not be forthcoming" because of the current financial crisis in the U.S. He added that he is concerned the situation could hinder the "enthusiasm and ability of philanthropic research and development" (Nullis, [AP/Los Angeles Times](#), 10/14).

According to [Reuters](#), Alan Bernstein, executive director of the [Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise](#), at the conference said that a "downturn in the economy" could "potentially have a negative impact on funding for science in general and HIV vaccine research in particular." He also emphasized the need for large pharmaceutical companies to invest more into vaccine research (Roelf, [Reuters](#), 10/14).

Also at the conference, the [International AIDS Vaccine Initiative](#) said that funding for HIV/AIDS vaccine research should continue even in light of the current economic situation. "My argument would be if you are going to cut, don't cut the little teeny bit that can give you the tolls to end the epidemic," IAVI President and CEO Seth Berkley said (Kahn, [Business Day](#), 10/16).

Fauci said that he could not "realistically" say whether researchers would develop an HIV/AIDS vaccine "in the classical sense," but that does not "mean we are going to give up trying." He added that "historically, vaccines have been the most cost-effective health interventions in history and continue to be so."

The four-day conference opened Monday, and about 900 participants are attending ([AP/Los Angeles Times](#), 10/14). The conference follows a year of several setbacks

in HIV vaccine research. [Merck](#) in September 2007 announced it had halted a large-scale clinical trial of its experimental HIV vaccine after the drug failed to prevent HIV infection in participants or prove effective in delaying the virus' progression to AIDS. The vaccine candidate also might have put some trial participants at an increased risk of HIV. Following news of the Merck vaccine, trials of NIH's [Vaccine Research Center](#)'s HIV vaccine candidate were scaled back (*Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report*, 10/14).

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