

PRESS RELEASE

Under embargo till July 20, 9 a.m. EST

Washington, D.C., July 20, 2012 -- A new initiative, the Collaboration for HIV/AIDS Immunological Therapy (CHAIT), will be announced at the [HIV Functional Cure Symposium](#) in Washington DC, preceding the [international AIDS conference](#), the premier gathering for those working in the field of HIV.

The CHAIT initiative is a public-private partnership focusing on the development of novel immunological therapeutic interventions to achieve a 'functional HIV cure' with the ultimate goal of HIV eradication. The objectives of CHAIT include: 1) to develop novel immunological approaches targeting latent HIV reservoirs; 2) to establish a leading translational program accelerating the development from bench research to clinical development; 3) to establish a robust immunological and virological monitoring platform; and 4) to engage effective dialogues with regulatory agencies to define new criteria for response to therapy. CHAIT's major strength is that it builds upon a public-private multidisciplinary partnership and leverages expertise from both academia and industry.

"CHAIT is aligned with the 'Towards an HIV Cure' scientific strategy of the International AIDS Society, the aim of which is to contribute to the establishment of an international research agenda and/or to stimulate new initiatives towards an HIV cure," said Prof Giuseppe Pantaleo ([SVRI](#), Switzerland) who, with Prof Yves Levy ([VRI](#), France), started this initiative. "The public-private partnership and the expertise of its members provides CHAIT with the opportunity to facilitate the clinical development of combined immunological therapeutic interventions to complement antiretroviral drugs."

Thirty years after the discovery of HIV, the advances in the understanding of HIV pathogenesis and in the development of potent and safe antiviral drugs have been outstanding. However, these drugs alone have failed to eradicate HIV. This inability is partly due to the persistence of HIV reservoirs in the blood and lymphoid tissue of infected individuals. Building on the lessons learned from past failures, CHAIT aims to develop new intervention strategies targeting the latent HIV infection through: 1) combinations of different intervention methods, including vaccines and immunomodulators, to potentiate host immune responses; 2) innovation in treatment regimens; 3) identification of relevant efficacy markers. With the participation across several pharmaceutical and biotech companies as well as academic groups, CHAIT represents a unique opportunity to improve collaboration and explore the possibility to combine different approaches in the ongoing search for cure.

"We need to shift to other strategies to target the covert reservoir of infected cells and to think how to combine agents that may rescue 'exhausted' T-cells with therapeutic vaccination that may stimulate T-cell responses in individuals already infected with HIV," said Prof Yves Levy. "The goal of the immunological interventions is to achieve control of HIV replication for an extended period of time in the absence of antiretroviral therapy, mimicking the situation of 'elite controllers'."

CHAIT Background

CHAIT was launched in response to the call “Towards an HIV Cure” led by Nobel Laureate Prof. Françoise Barre-Sinoussi, President of the [International AIDS Society](#).

CHAIT is an initiative supported by the Swiss Vaccine Research Institute in Switzerland, the Vaccine Research Institute in France, Boehringer Ingelheim, FIT Biotech, GlaxoSmithKline Vaccines, Sanofi Pasteur and ViiV Healthcare.

CHAIT is a public-private partnership driven by a common scientific agenda and the combined scientific expertise of its members. CHAIT is open to additional members with common scientific interests.

About the Swiss Vaccine Research Institute (SVRI)

The SVRI is a partnership of 5 research institutes in Switzerland (www.swissvaccineresearchinstitute.ch). The SVRI was created in 2007 in Lausanne and is supported by the Swiss Secretariat of Education and Research. Its primary objective is to develop effective preventive vaccine strategies and therapeutic vaccine interventions for infectious diseases and for cancer. SVRI plays an instrumental role in linking basic research to translational research. SVRI’s research program targets primarily HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, as well as the emerging influenza pandemic threat. SVRI benefits also from ongoing efforts in the area of cancer vaccine research. The SVRI hosting house is the Lausanne University Hospital (Lausanne, Switzerland).

About the Vaccine Research Institute (VRI)

The French Government in collaboration with the ANRS/INSERM and University Paris Est Créteil (UPEC) created VRI in 2011. The VRI is located in Mondor Hospital (Créteil, France) with internal and external teams involving key international scientific researchers through a unique collaborative network and with a central strategic plan. The VRI's structure strengthens the links between basic, translational research, patients associations and the socio-economic world, accelerating vaccine development. The mission of the VRI is to conduct research to develop an effective vaccine against HIV/AIDS and HCV. One of the priorities of the VRI's programme is the DC-targeting vaccine platform for improved antigen delivery in prophylactic and therapeutic vaccine development.

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Editor’s notes:

Functional HIV Cure is a remission state with long-term control of HIV, including low viral loads (amount of HIV in the blood), in the absence of antiretroviral therapy. A Functional Cure would not necessarily eliminate the virus but would allow a person to remain healthy without antiviral drugs.

Elite Controllers refer to those very few HIV infected people (below 1%) with no measurable virus in the blood for at least one year in the absence of antiviral drugs.