BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

Reality report: AIDS R&D needs more money

July 3, 2013 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau



Singapore: Recent breakthroughs in HIV prevention research have confirmed the promise of new options to help end the AIDS epidemic and highlight the urgent need for ongoing research to develop additional prevention options and support rapid rollout of proven ones.

However, continued progress requires a broader base of funders committed to sustained support, according to the new report from Research to Reality, titled, 'Investing in HIV prevention research in a challenging environment', which was released in Kuala Lumpur.

Steady progress in R&D for HIV vaccines, pre-exposure prophylaxis using antiretroviral drugs (PrEP), and treatment as prevention have confirmed the critical role that science has to play in providing solutions to end the AIDS epidemic. However, the ninth annual report from the HIV Vaccines and Microbicides Resource Tracking Working Group shows that funding has essentially plateaued.

In 2012, a total of $1.31 billion were invested across R&D for six key prevention areas, including preventive HIV vaccines, microbicides, PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) using antiretroviral drugs, treatment as prevention, operations research related to voluntary medical male circumcision and prevention of vertical transmission. This is a six percent increase over the funding received in 2011. However, a significant portion of this increase is likely due to improved reporting by several donors.

"Science has a critical role to play in ending the AIDS epidemic," said Dr Luiz Loures, deputy executive director, UNAIDS. "The potential returns on investments are hugely important and I strongly urge donors to make funding for R&D a top priority."

According to the report, the US remained the largest public sector investor of HIV prevention research, spending a total of $925 million in 2012, which is 70 percent of the total investment in HIV prevention R&D. This further underscoring the importance of fostering broader commitments by additional global partners.

"As the report highlights, the HIV vaccine field has been a leader in catalyzing innovative partnerships across the public, private, philanthropic and academic sectors. Such partnerships can help integrate new funders and help enhance the

information exchange and collaboration that is required as we tackle remaining critical questions in immunology as we move forward to develop even more effective prevention options," said Ms Margaret McGlynn, president and CEO, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

For the first time this year, the report includes the critical investment made by HIV prevention research trial participants. In 2012, there were 99,931 participants in HIV prevention research trials, primarily based in sites with high HIV burden in South Africa, Uganda and the US. As more efficacy trials are planned, tens of thousands more women and men in the communities hardest hit by HIV will take time from their daily lives to participate in clinical trials and to help end the epidemic, representing a significant, ongoing investment in prevention R&D.