

HELP US PUSH FOR A CURE FOR AIDS

The AIDS Policy Project launched a campaign for a *cure* for AIDS in November, 2009. There have been important research breakthroughs in the last two years, so there is hope that a cure useful to millions of people could be found in the near future (perhaps in 5 to 10 years). But this is not a sure thing. **The leading AIDS cure research funder, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Washington, spends only 3% of its AIDS research budget on a cure, or between \$40-\$60 million per year.**

As one man living with HIV put it, “I think they should be spending a billion dollars on cure research. I thought they were already doing that. I dropped my teeth when I saw this.”

Community action is needed to push members of Congress and Francis Collins, the Director of the NIH, to make a cure for AIDS a top funding priority at NIH. NIH leaders say that a cure is a priority, but have made no move to increase funding for it. We are calling for a funding increase to \$240 million.

Our group is also helping researchers cut through red tape, encouraging them to work together and share information, promoting brand-new ideas, and advocating for scientific breakthroughs to be tested in *people*, as soon as it is safe to do so.

But we can't do this without our community of people who care about AIDS.

- **Please click on this link and send a message to Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health, asking for \$240 million for AIDS cure research: <http://bit.ly/dbVdt0>**
- We also need financial contributions to keep going. If you are interested in supporting this campaign for a cure or have a friend who might be, please click on the **DONATE** button on our web site: <http://www.AIDSPolicyProject.org> or call us at 215-939-7852. (Our mailing address is at the bottom of this page). If you have a smart phone, you can even donate from your phone by visiting our web site.
- Send a message to list@aidspolicyproject.org for updates on our work and any comments you have.

Background Information:

The difference between an AIDS vaccine and a cure for AIDS: Scientists are still trying to develop both an AIDS vaccine and an AIDS cure that is ok for millions of people. A cure and a vaccine are two different things. **A cure for AIDS would help people who already have the virus get well again and not need AIDS drugs anymore. An AIDS vaccine would help protect people who don't yet have the virus.** A cure would mean that people with HIV would not have to take AIDS drugs any more—either their immune system would be able to control the virus (which is called a “**functional cure**,” or the virus would be eliminated completely from their body (this is called a “**sterilizing cure**.”) We support both a vaccine and a cure, but we are focusing on a cure.

Is there already a cure for AIDS? There actually has been one person who has been cured of AIDS. But the

treatment he received was so risky (although it worked out for him) that taking AIDS drugs for the rest of a

person's life is much safer. Here's what happened. The man who was cured is known as "The Berlin Patient" because this all happened in Berlin, Germany.

The Berlin Patient is an American man of about 40 years old who lived in Berlin, had AIDS and also leukemia (blood cancer). His leukemia doctor needed to give him a bone marrow transplant to treat the leukemia. But the doctor intentionally used a special person as a bone marrow donor--someone who was born with the "CCR5 deletion" (remember those initials) which means that the person cannot be infected with AIDS. About 1/1,000 Northern Europeans are born with this. The reason it protects you from AIDS is that you are born missing one of the puzzle pieces that HIV needs to infect your cells. (Technically, you are born missing the CCR5 "co-receptor." It's actually a mutation.)

It's been over three years since the Berlin Patient received the bone marrow transplant from the person who was born with the CCR5 deletion mutation. The Berlin Patient is alive and well and so far he is completely HIV free--not just with a zero viral load in his blood, but no HIV in his brain, stomach, etc. despite extensive and very sensitive testing--much more in-depth tests than people with AIDS receive from their doctors. Also, the bone marrow transplant knocked out the cancer, so he's also cancer-free. The Berlin Patient's treatment was very risky and expensive but also it was a major scientific breakthrough. It has led to important new follow-up research. This case was written up in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

One interesting follow-up experiment to the Berlin Patient case is being conducted by Dr. Paula Cannon at the University of Southern California. She is using mice that have been given human immune systems. She then infects the mice with HIV. She takes out some of their immune system cells, treats them with a new technology (called "zinc finger" technology) that removes the CCR5 receptors, puts the treated immune cells back into the mice and--the mice get better. The advantage of this treatment is that because the immune cells come from the patient (mouse's) own body originally, the whole thing is much safer than the Berlin Patient treatment, which relied on cells from another person. The next step is to test this therapy in a very small group of people.

Is AIDS a chronic, manageable disease? AIDS drugs, though essential for life in the absence of a cure, can be very hard on the bodies of people with HIV. Even these medications are only available to about 30% of people with AIDS who need them around the world, and it is unlikely that most people with AIDS in developing countries will be able to get the AIDS drugs they will need for the rest of their lives, though we strongly support universal access to AIDS meds. In the US, there is currently a waiting list of over 4,000 people who need AIDS medications and cannot get them because there is not enough money in the AIDS Drug Assistance Program.

People with AIDS in developing countries need and deserve a cure, and so do people in the US.

What is the AIDS Policy Project? The AIDS Policy Project is a group of experienced HIV advocates and strategists, including people living with AIDS, on both the East and West Coasts. Our members have, on average, ten years of experience each as successful AIDS, LGBT rights, and poverty activists and organizers. We work in close solidarity with colleagues overseas. We reject the idea that AIDS prevention funding must compete with treatment funding, research must compete with care, tuberculosis funding must compete with AIDS. We actively support each of these. We are attorneys, social workers, physicians, organizers, and people from many other walks of life. We are racially and economically diverse. Check out our web site (and our report): <http://www.aidspolicyproject.org/> Facebook page: <http://tiny.cc/vt38Y> and AIDS Cure Blog: <http://aidspolicyproject.blogspot.com>