



## **AIDS charity offers experiment funds**

By Andrew Jack  
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Commercial biotech companies will be able to receive non-profit funding for experiments that help develop an HIV vaccine, under a programme to be launched today.

It brings together rival venture capital groups with a charitable research organisation.

The New York-based International AIDS Vaccine Initiative plans to split \$10m between 15 to 20 small and medium-sized biotech companies over the next three years through its Innovation Fund.

The aim is to persuade biotech companies that focus on medicines and vaccines in fields other than HIV to test promising discoveries for their potential in the development of an AIDS vaccine.

Seth Berkeley, head of IAVI, said: "We need people to undertake extremely high risk research, and there is currently no mechanism to do that." Companies will be identified through referrals from an advisory board initially including five of the US's leading life sciences venture capital groups, including Kleiner Perkins.

The new approach comes at a time of heightened frustration for AIDS vaccine researchers, after the cancellation last week because of disappointing results of one of the most promising projects, developed by Merck of the US.

IAVI, which already funds in-house and external research and is supported by a range of donors, has received an initial \$5m from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation towards its new fund and plans to raise a similar amount from other sources.

Scientific, regulatory and commercial challenges have limited private sector interest in HIV vaccine research, but IAVI hopes its support will be sufficient to persuade companies to test the application of their ideas to the field.