

Gates Foundation forms new health partnerships in SA

The Medical Research Council (MRC) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) on Tuesday (21 January) announced two new partnerships with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation aimed at finding new tools to fight HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria.

By [Tamar Kahn](#) 22 Jan 2014



Trevor Mundel and Bill Gates. Image: [Pharma Marketing](#)

The partnerships will have a combined budget of R370m, and will be led by South African scientists.

"SA has world-class researchers and the infrastructure necessary to develop the kinds of innovative health solutions needed to accelerate progress against TB, HIV, malaria and other infectious diseases," said Trevor Mundel, president of the Gates Foundation's Global Health Programme.

He said the partnerships had enormous potential for both SA and the African continent.

The first partnership will see the MRC's Strategic Health Innovation Partnerships (SHIP) receive about R125m from the Gates Foundation, plus another R130m from the Department of Science and Technology, and R60m from the Department of Health for research into HIV and TB vaccines over the next three years.

Drug candidates

The second partnership will benefit UCT's Drug Discovery and Development Centre, H3-D, which will get about R55m from the Gates Foundation over five years for its work in developing novel drug candidates for TB and malaria.

The unit has already received R50m from SHIP and the Technology Innovation Agency. Two years ago it announced the discovery of a novel chemical compound for treating malaria, work it had conducted with the Medicines for Malaria Venture. The compound, dubbed MMV390048, was found to be safe and effective in rodents, and is due to be tested in humans for the first time later this year.

MRC president Salim Abdool Karim said the SHIP programme offered South African scientists a unique opportunity to lead projects seeking new technologies for improving health, from diagnostics and vaccines to therapies and devices.

"Ultimately our goal is simple. We want to improve the quality of life of all South Africans," he told reporters.

Mundel said the Gates Foundation made about US\$3.4bn in philanthropic investments each year, of which US\$600m went towards medical research and development. By contrast the pharmaceutical industry invested about US\$130bn a year in research and development, he said. "We really have to try and leverage our investments, hence the significance of government investments," he said.

Mundel said funding applications to the Gates Foundation for medical research were closely evaluated to ensure that every cent invested is used well.

UCT's acting vice-chancellor, Thandabantu Nhlapo, said the support from the Gates Foundation was a "vote of confidence" in UCT's scientific capabilities and would help Africans develop solutions for African problems.

"Research creates jobs, career opportunities and infrastructure, and helps reverse the brain drain. People will come and work in Africa if it is exciting to do so," he said.

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