

Introduction

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# The OptAIDS project: towards global halting of HIV/AIDS

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## Introduction

We face a unique, transitory opportunity in the history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, because we have collectively pooled money faster than the epidemic has grown [1]. Can we then seize the moment and halt this epidemic now? Most scenarios for the future of HIV/AIDS project modest reductions spread out over decades [2]. The very timescale of such projections, beyond the persistence time of all models, makes them unreliable [3]. Can we do better, quicker?

The OptAIDS project was conceived as a means to address this issue. Its implementation thus far has been twofold: a workshop held in July 2008 and this supplement on the eradication of AIDS. The aims of the project are to address two questions:

1. Can we optimally spend our way out of the HIV/AIDS epidemic?
2. Can we work together to build a World Halting AIDS Model (WHAM) that would permit us to estimate the quickest way to halt HIV/AIDS, monitor our success, and adjust our strategy as we go?

The OptAIDS project grew out of a frustration with existing attempts to tackle the disease. AIDS exceptionalism means that HIV/AIDS is handled differently from other public-health epidemics, which has likely been detrimental [4,5]. Consequently, much of the funding of HIV/AIDS efforts has been for qualitative observations of the

expanding epidemic rather than quantitatively effective intervention.

Although fund accumulation has recently outpaced the epidemic, we argue that plans to spend donor money are too long range in the face of a growing epidemic [6]. Long-range scenarios have no reality to them, so that only short-term solutions - those that fall within the persistence time of their models - have any possibility of being realistic [3].

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of the turnout in Second Life<sup>®</sup> demonstrated the effectiveness of virtual conferencing; many more people were able to attend the conference than would have been feasible



