

Member companies support leading research for HIV/AIDS vaccine

Seven ICMM member companies - BHP Billiton, Gold Fields, Lonmin, Mitsubishi Materials Corporation, Nippon Mining and Metals, Rio Tinto and Sumitomo Metal and Mining - are among a donor syndicate committed to funding the Southern Africa clinical trials of Virax's VIR201 therapeutic vaccine for HIV/AIDS. Other members of the syndicate are African Rainbow Minerals, Anvil Mining, Assmang and Paladin Energy.

A South African non-profit organization called the Theravax Foundation has been established for corporate donors who have significant operations and interests in South Africa and other African countries where HIV/AIDS is endemic. It will provide funding for a phase I/IIa trial in an emerging country environment.

In effect, the Theravax Foundation is a global coalition of corporations to fight AIDS with contributions from four nations – Australia, Japan, South Africa and the United Kingdom. The project has secured over 90% of the required funding and continues to seek additional funding from other corporate donors.

The proposed trial will involve 140 HIV positive participants in five well established HIV clinics across four provinces in South Africa. A Clinical Trial Application has been lodged with the South African Medicines Control Council to conduct the trial, by Virax, a Melbourne-based pharmaceutical company engaged in the discovery and development of novel immunotherapeutic products for the treatment of chronic infectious diseases.

Funding of the Project will be non-dilutive to Virax, which is to contribute a limited license of its VIR201 intellectual property. The international contract research organisation (CRO), Quintiles, will implement the trial and provide project management in South Africa under Virax's management control.

VIR201 is one of the only therapeutic vaccines based on stimulating the immune system known to have shown a positive effect in suppressing virus levels in HIV infected patients in fully controlled clinical trials.