

Foundation for the NIH Launches GeneConvene Global Collaborative

New Program Will Advance Best Practices for Innovative Approach to Combat Malaria

July 23, 2020 – Bethesda, MD – The Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH) today announced the launch of the [GeneConvene Global Collaborative](#), an initiative to advance the safe and responsible exploration of genetic biocontrol technologies, a set of investigational public health tools with the potential to save lives, particularly those afflicted with mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), malaria sickened more than 225 million people in 2018 and killed more than 400,000. As progress against malaria has slowed due to factors such as increasing resistance of mosquitoes to insecticides, expert bodies such as the WHO, the African Union, and The Lancet Commission on Malaria Eradication have called for research into new tools.

The new program will initially focus on prevention of malaria through the use of gene drive technology. Gene drive technology, a method to promote the spread of certain genes in organisms such as mosquitoes, is currently being explored by scientists in the laboratory. If effective, gene drive could help to reduce the toll of malaria either by reducing the reproduction of malaria-carrying mosquitoes, so fewer will be present to spread disease, or by decreasing their ability to carry the malaria parasite.

“The FNIH has been at the forefront of discussions on responsible evaluation of genetic biocontrol technologies since 2005 – for example, leading the development of the first guidance and standards for gene drive research,” said Maria C. Freire, Ph.D., President and Executive Director, FNIH. “This important initiative leverages our experience creating effective alliances to advance biomedical research and improve human well-being.”

Key focus areas of the new GeneConvene Global Collaborative include:

- Anticipating emerging issues and building consensus for best practices and guidance, such as recommendations on the safe and ethical testing of gene drive;
- Providing technical support to foster a responsible approach to research and governance, including the external assessment of potential risks associated with testing a new investigational product; and
- Serving as a global hub for relevant, accurate and timely information, for example through the new [GeneConvene Virtual Institute](#), a learning tool for those interested in the scientific, social and ethical dimensions of gene drive or other genetic biocontrol technologies, emphasizing public health applications.

“Genetic technologies such as gene drive hold great promise, and as an emerging area of science, they require a rigorous approach,” said Willy Tonui, Ph.D., EBS, GeneConvene partner and former CEO of Kenya’s National Biosafety Authority. “GeneConvene will help ensure that genetic biocontrol technologies are explored collaboratively with the involvement of stakeholders around the world.”

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About the GeneConvene Global Collaborative

The GeneConvene Global Collaborative, a program of the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health, advances best practices for genetic biocontrol technologies, a set of investigational public health tools with the potential to save many lives. For additional information, please visit fnih.org/geneconvene.

About the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health

The Foundation for the National Institutes of Health is a not-for-profit charitable organization that creates and leads alliances and public-private partnerships that advance breakthrough biomedical discoveries and improve the quality of people’s lives. For additional information about the FNIH, please visit fnih.org.