Dear Editor,

We welcome the report Defeating AIDS—advancing global health\(^1\). The think tank generated four scenarios providing a blueprint for forward thinking on the AIDS response. However there is a gaping omission. We note within the 48 page document the word child/children appears 44 times. Ten within the references. Of the 34 mentions in the body text, 31 refer to "mother-to-child" - so children slip in on the backs (or bellies) of their mother. The other three times is the rightful lamentation of slow rollout and inadequate treatment formulations for children. But there is more to children than PMTCT. We would be keen to know if the plans for tomorrow have any specific consideration for children or if the strategy advises that child HIV policies cling to the skirt/shirt tails of the adult policy - despite the fact that children will be the recipients and true users of the next policy. The attention to key populations - men who have sex with men (MSM), injecting drug users, sex workers, prisoners and residents in hot spots are entirely adult referenced. MSM, sex workers, prisoners and drug users may well have children\(^2\) whose needs may be overshadowed. The worrying statistics on adolescents is an important step, but policy needs to dive further down the age span\(^3\) and include younger children in the vision\(^4\).

The brief urges investment in research and innovation. There is a growing evidence base that children need more than treatment\(^5\), need combination approaches (e.g. cash+care\(^6\)) to overcome barriers to effective treatment and prevention\(^7\). Insufficient and narrow programming for children is ineffective at best and detrimental at worst. Sustained, long term\(^8\) reliable funding is a crucial foundation - eroded by short term quick fix interventions creating instability when withdrawn. There is solid evidence of the effects of adult HIV on child development\(^9\). We urge policies to include structural interventions that include children. We note that activism and engagement from and for young children is complex and often reliant on advocates to rally on their behalf. The scenarios and allied costs need to take into account additional provision and burden for child inclusion\(^10\). We find the call to action and the global challenge exciting but without specific child inclusion the scenario reads like Hamlet without the Prince.

Yours
The author and signatories have no conflicts of interest. All are active in HIV/AIDS research and programming.


