

MVI Key Staff Biographies



Christian Loucq, MD
Director

Dr. Christian Loucq directs the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI), which seeks to accelerate the development of promising malaria vaccines and ensure their availability and use in developing countries. Dr. Loucq has more than 30 years of experience in medicine, pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and global health.

He joined MVI in February 2007, serving first as Director of Strategy and Operations and then as Interim Director until his appointment as MVI Director three months later.

His professional experience spans the globe: Born and educated in France, he has lived and worked in Algeria, Belgium, Chad, China, India, the Netherlands, Niger, Switzerland, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. Dr. Loucq has managed vaccine businesses in China, India, and Thailand and has been involved in most stages of vaccine development. He has worked with large vaccine companies, such as GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur, and biotech companies including Rhein Biotech and Acambis. He has extensive experience partnering with local governments, building public-private partnerships, and setting up local private collaborations.

Dr. Loucq earned his State Doctorate of Human Medicine at the University of Paris X and a Diploma of Public Health and Tropical Medicine from the University of Aix-Marseilles.

Ashley Birkett, PhD
*Director,
Preclinical
Research and
Development*

Ashley Birkett directs MVI's early-stage vaccine development-efforts, including the assessment of vaccine technologies for inclusion in its portfolio and scientific and technical assessment of its ongoing projects. He also oversees relationships with external partners who are engaged in MVI-supported preclinical research and development (R&D) projects.

Dr. Birkett has more than ten years of experience in the vaccine industry, directing research and preclinical development. Prior to joining MVI he served as Senior Director of Preclinical Research at Acambis, where he oversaw the company's global preclinical vaccine research portfolio. He also served as Project Leader for Acambis' Universal Influenza Vaccine candidate, transitioning it from research, through the development phase and into early stage clinical trials. He previously held the title of Vice President of Preclinical Research at Apovia, where he also served as Project Leader for their influenza and malaria vaccine programs. He successfully transitioned the malaria

vaccine candidate from discovery through early-stage clinical testing and secured funding for the program from both National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID/NIH) and PATH MVI.

Ashley holds a PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics from Virginia Commonwealth University and a BSc (Honors) in Applied Biological Sciences from Bristol Polytechnic (now University of the West of England) in the United Kingdom.

Santiago Ferro, MD

Director, Clinical Development & Regulatory Affairs

Santiago Ferro is the Director of Clinical Development and Regulatory Affairs at MVI.

He oversees the development of malaria vaccine candidates in MVI's portfolio as they move into human clinical trials.

Dr. Ferro comes to MVI after serving for two years as a Scientific Officer of Methodology & Innovation in the Clinical Development & Medical Affairs Department at Novartis Pharmaceuticals. Before that, he was a Clinical Team Leader for Clinical Development in the Clinical Department at Sanofi Pasteur Limited. Dr. Ferro has experience in clinical development of both drugs and vaccines.

Dr. Ferro spent close to two decades working in infectious diseases at several teaching hospitals in Colombia, including the Central Military Hospital and San Ignacio University Hospital, both in Bogotá. He also spent three years as a Clinical Associate in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Toronto General Hospital's HIV Clinic. He received his medical degree at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá.

Tonya Villafana, PhD, MPH

Director, Portfolio Management

Dr. Tonya Villafana is responsible for the oversight of MVI's vaccine candidate portfolio and works closely with vaccine project teams and other units, including R&D and Business Development, to ensure MVI's vaccine-development goals are met. She also chairs MVI's Portfolio Management Committee and is MVI's representative on the board of the Malaria Clinical Trials Alliance.

Prior to joining MVI, she was the Site Director of the HIV Vaccine Initiative at the Botswana Harvard School of Public Health AIDS Initiative Partnership for HIV Research and Education, where she was awarded the Site Director of the Year Award in 2004 by the HIV Vaccine Trials Network. As Site Director, Villafana established sites to conduct HIV vaccine trials, oversaw research regulatory requirements, and collaborated with local and national institutions for the conduct of HIV vaccine research. She has also served as a technical advisor to WHO on HIV vaccine research issues and as Secretary of the Botswana National HIV Vaccine Committee.

Tonya holds a PhD in immunology from Cornell University Graduate School of Medical Sciences and an MPH from the Harvard School of Public Health.