

The world's best charity can save a life for \$3,337.06

Chris Weller Jul. 29, 2015, 12:40 PM



This isn't a melodramatic TV commercial: For \$3,340, you can save a life right now.

That's how much it costs to save one life if you donate to the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF), [the top charity in the world](#)— as judged by GiveWell, a non-profit charity evaluator and advocate for [effective altruism](#).



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While other charity evaluators tend only to look at where money is going, GiveWell's research seeks to understand how much gets there, who needs it most, and, perhaps most important, what that money can do.

AMF rises above the rest.

In the developed world, mosquitoes are pesky insects. But in underdeveloped countries in Africa, mosquitoes carry a raft of diseases. Easily the most deadly of those is malaria, which is responsible for approximately [600,000 deaths](#) annually.

Rather than invest millions in finding a vaccine, AMF tries to avoid infection through insecticide-treated bed nets, which have [loads of research](#) behind them supporting their effectiveness.

GiveWell has three major requirements when selecting its top charities, and AMF fulfills all of them. The solution is proven to work, it successfully passes a vetting process (in this case, figuring out if AMF makes good on delivering the bed nets to people in need), and it's underfunded, which means there is a real need for outside donation.

AMF is one of [only a handful of charities](#) that meet the organization's strict criteria, says Catherine Hollander, an outreach associate at GiveWell. That means it can then be put under heavy scrutiny from the non-profit's research arm to root out how far a dollar actually goes. The final number after copious number crunching: \$3,337.06.

That total is a rough guideline, GiveWell stipulates. It's meant to be a helpful placeholder that can guide people's donation. With myriad overhead costs, including manufacturing and delivery costs, there

are always unknowns.

That's why GiveWell argues it's a tad disingenuous when charities purport to save lives on the cheap. ✓



A bed net may cost \$5 to manufacture, but a \$5 donation won't necessarily save a life.

CDC

As the effective altruist Peter Singer [noted in "The Life You Can Save,"](#) not every child who uses a bed net would necessarily have died from malaria — only a fraction would meet that fate. Likewise, not every donated net will save a life, as some will inevitably be misused.

Charities that make such claims typically refer to the "cost per child treated" as the relevant metric in deciding whether to donate. But as GiveWell's research shows, that approaches a solution from the wrong direction: Donors need to account for all the other costs that make the charity work. For AMF, GiveWell uses the "cost per life saved."

So while the total of \$3,340 may seem high, it's only because other numbers have been artificially low. GiveWell's research into AMF takes into account all the surrounding costs and statistical likelihoods that could prevent a lesser donation from reaching its ultimate goal: the prevention of fatal malaria.

But according to Sean Conley, a research analyst at GiveWell, you don't need to give thousands of dollars to make a difference.

"On an intuitive level, giving people additional money who are among the poorest in the world — even small amounts of money — will make a big difference in their lives," Conley says.

And if you give to a charity like AMF, you know the money is going to the right places.

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