



Immune Responses, On Cue™

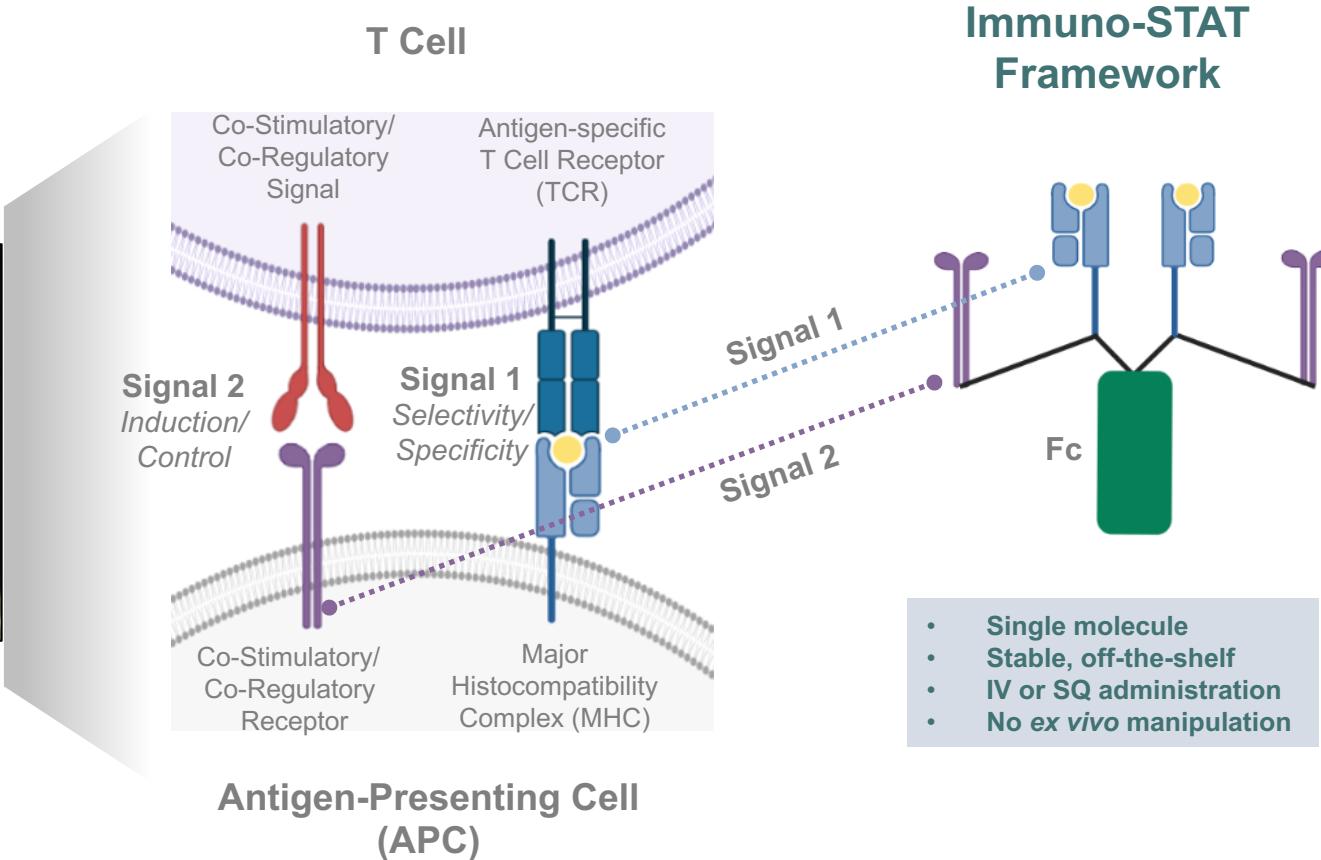
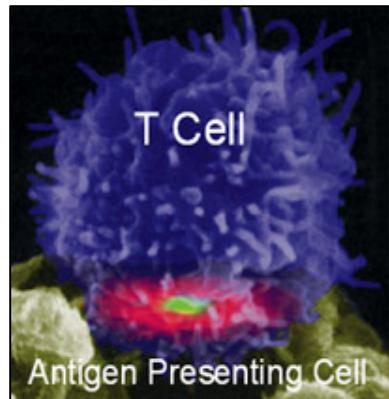
## Directly Targeting Autoantigen-Specific T cells with Immuno-STATs

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**Saso Cemerski**

VP and Head of Discovery and Translational Immunology

# Emulating Nature's Cues to Selectively Modulate T Cells

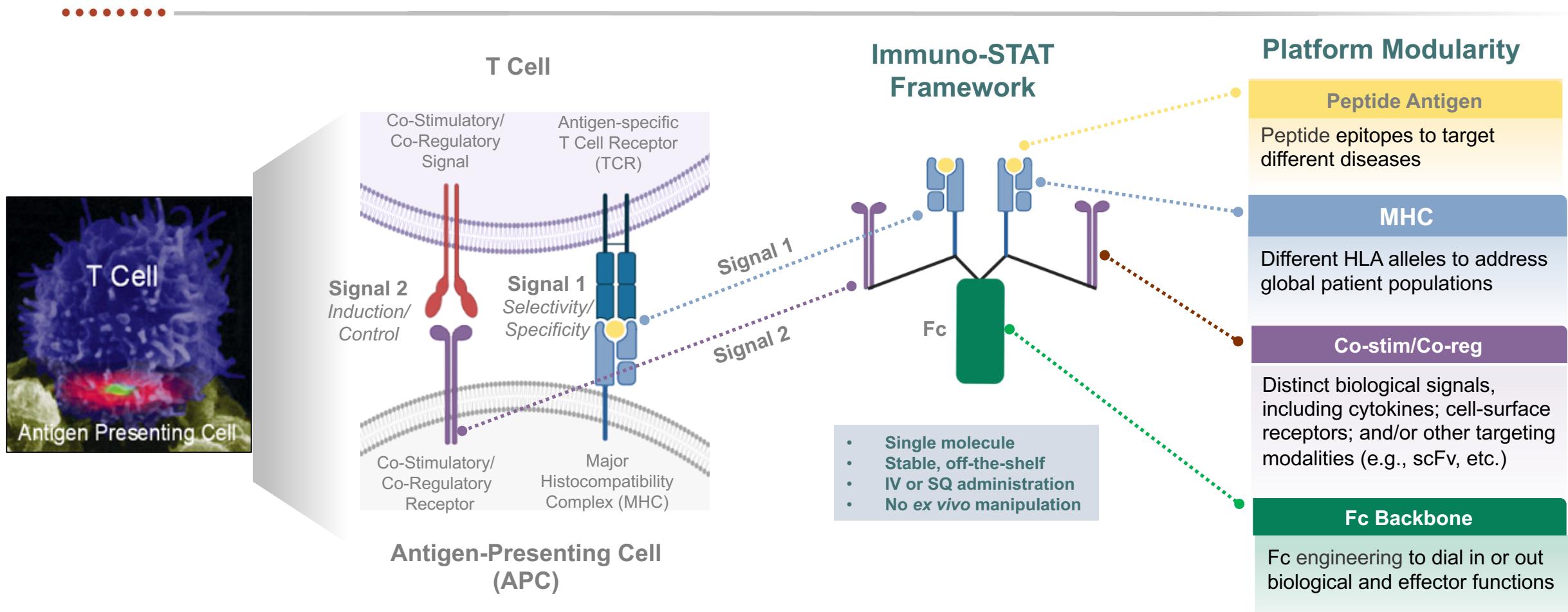


- Single molecule
- Stable, off-the-shelf
- IV or SQ administration
- No *ex vivo* manipulation

The Immuno-STAT™ platform can generate a wide diversity of therapeutic molecules for many diseases to selectively target and modulate the activity of disease-relevant T cells



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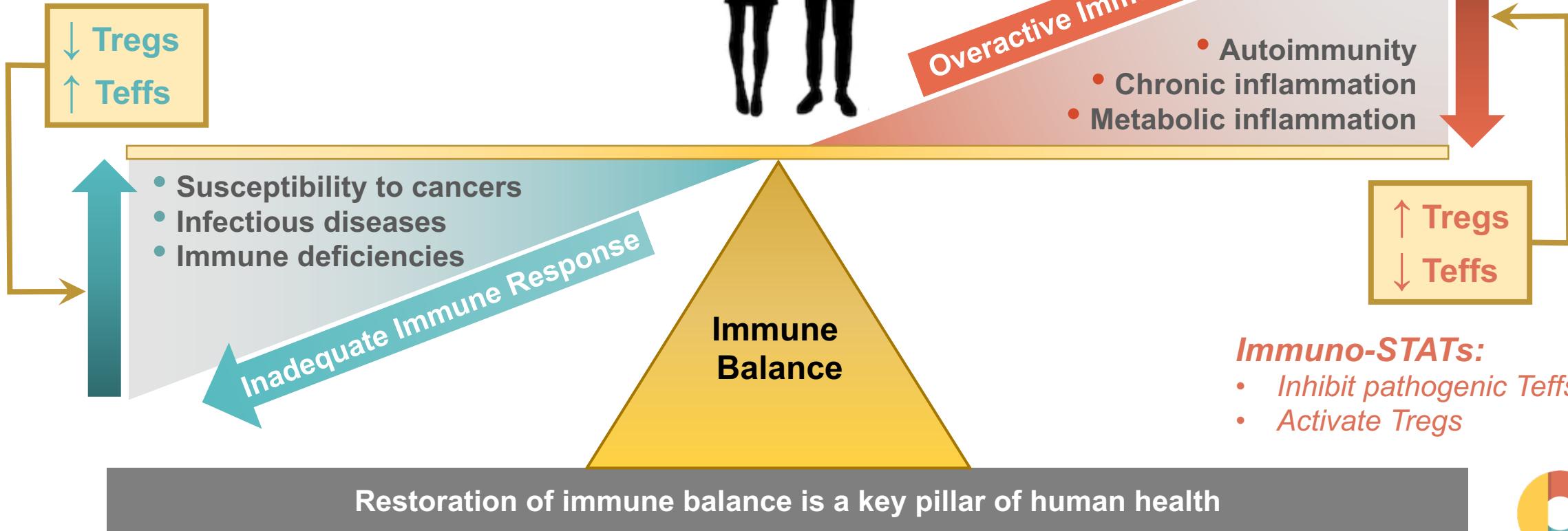


# Immuno-STATs are Designed to Restore Immune Balance

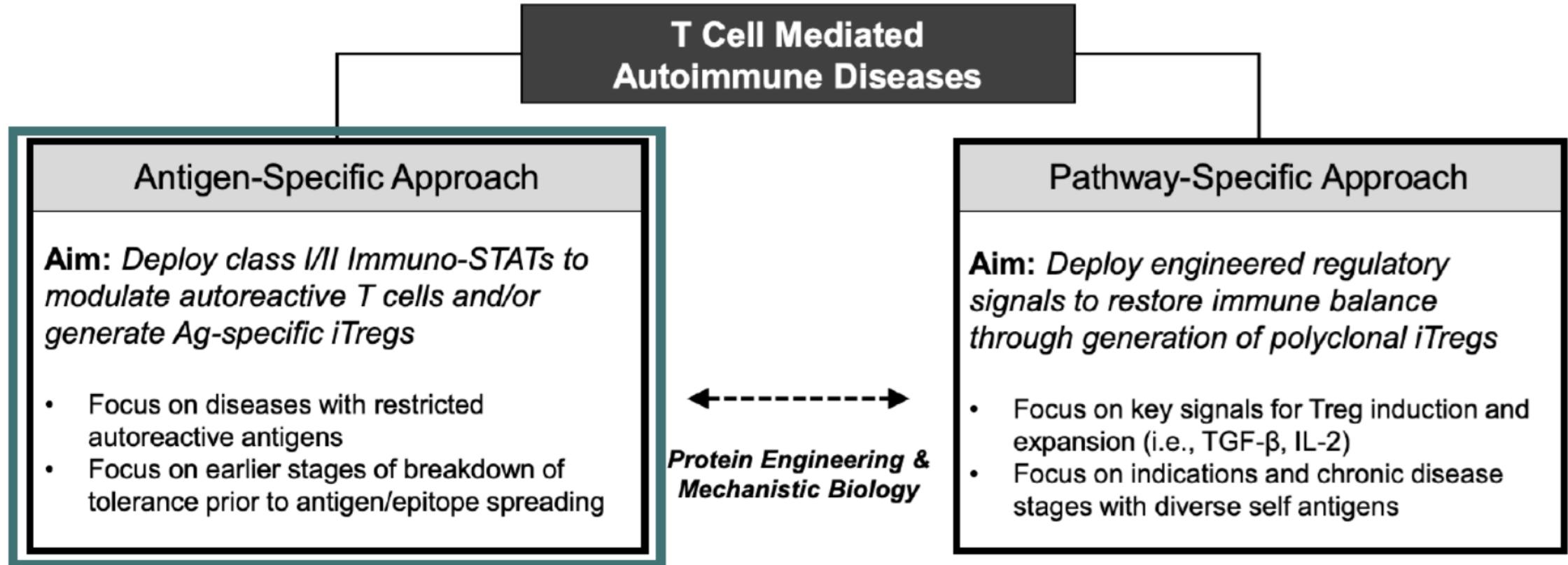


## Immuno-STATs:

- Expand disease-specific Teffs
- Re-activate exhausted Teffs
- Inhibit and/or deplete Tregs



Key: Teffs, effector T cells; Tregs, regulatory T cells



# Target Rationale and Therapeutic Hypothesis

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## Target rationale:

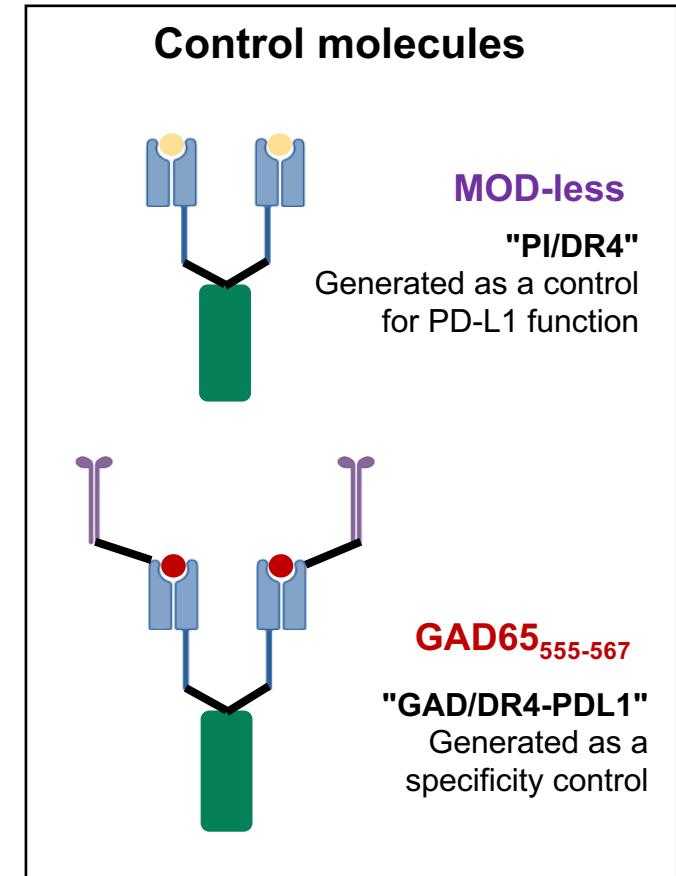
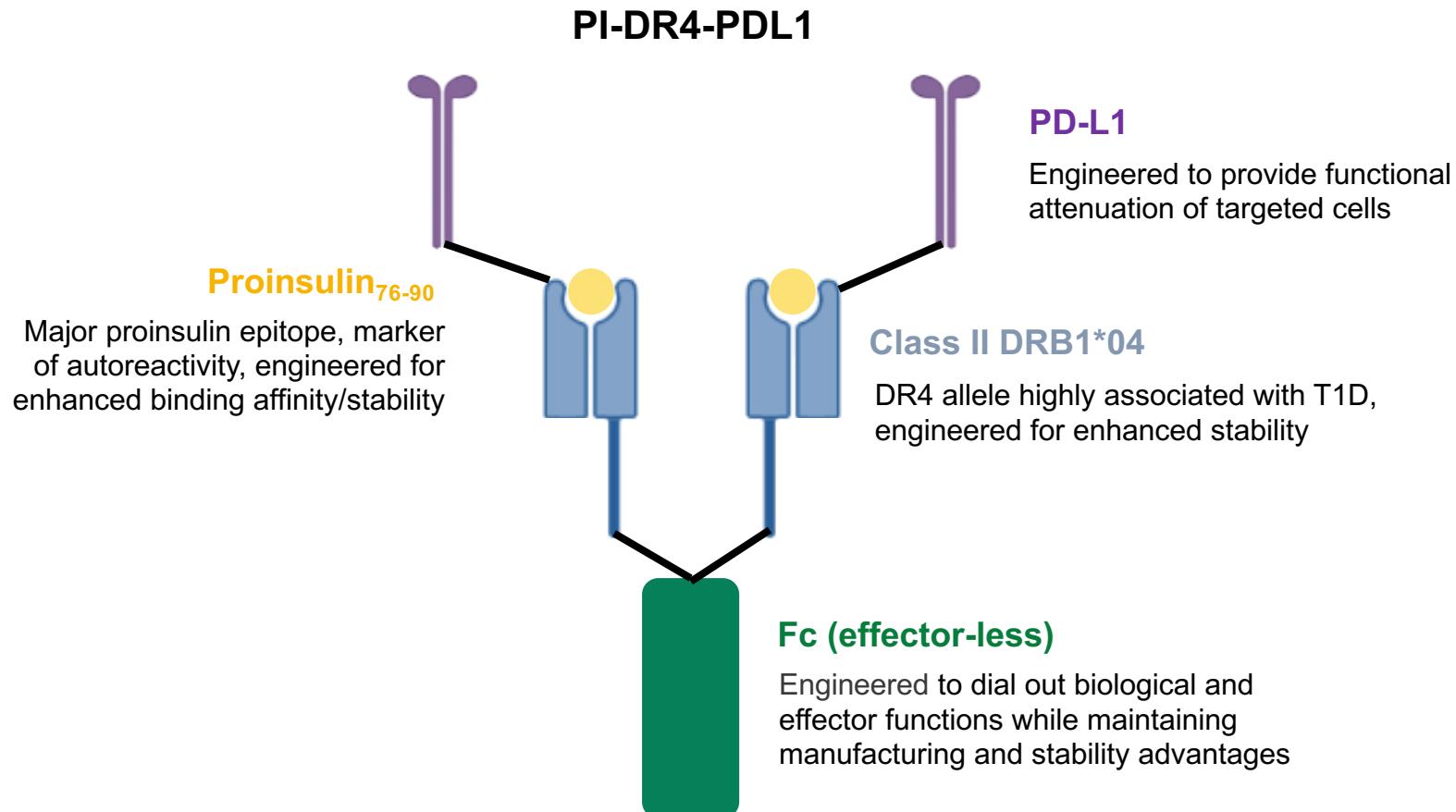
- Type 1 diabetes (T1D) is a chronic autoimmune disease resulting in severe loss of pancreatic  $\beta$  cells due to the targeting of islet cell autoantigens
  - Imbalances in the number and/or function of antigen-specific (AgS) autoreactive T cells (Teff) and/or regulatory T cells (Tregs) are considered the main effectors of  $\beta$  cell destruction
- ~50% of the genetic risk for T1D derives from specific HLA alleles involved in the presentation of peptide antigens to T cells
  - Allelic associations with disease are known (DR4, DQ8)
  - Critical peptide-HLA class II T cell epitopes are known (e.g., Proinsulin, GAD65, InsB, etc)
- Intervention in T1D may be achieved by:
  - (1) deletion or functional attenuation of AgS pathogenic Teff and/or
  - (2) expansion or functional enhancement of AgS Treg

## Therapeutic hypothesis:

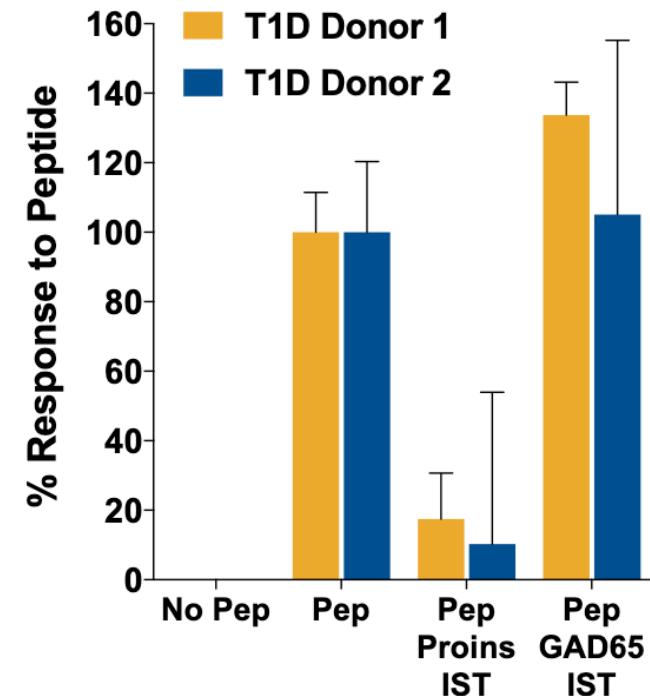
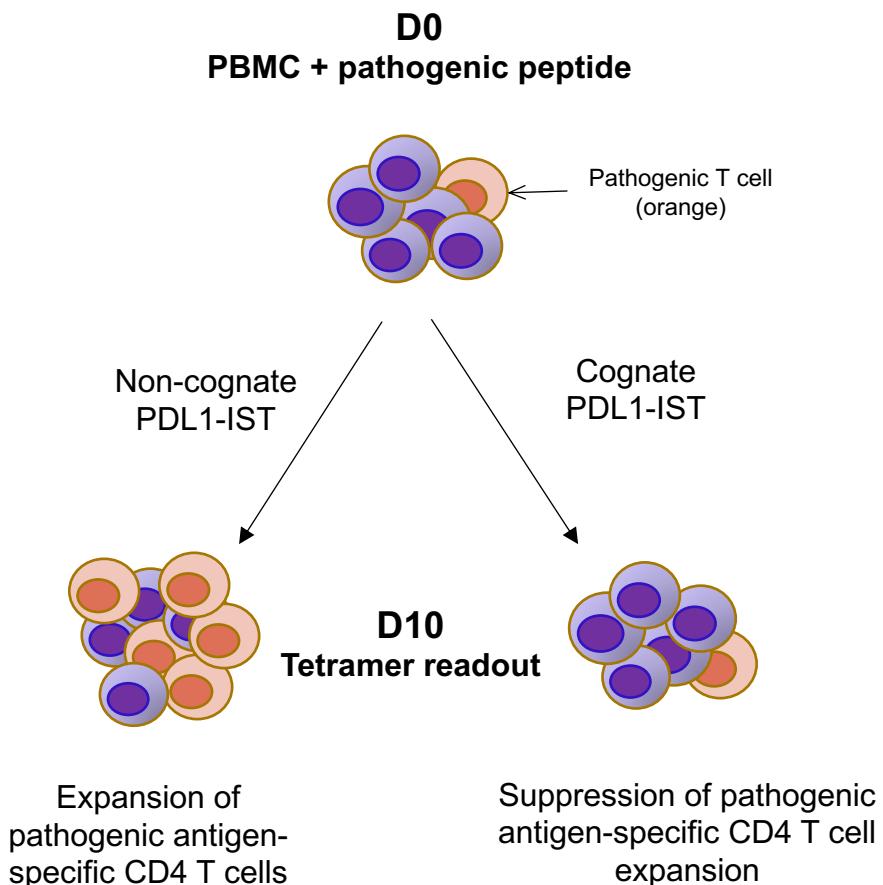
- Peptide-HLA class II-based Immuno-STATs (ISTs) can target disease-relevant CD4+ T cells for therapeutic effect in T1D through their deletion/functional attenuation



# Design of the Proins<sub>76-90</sub>, K88S/DR4-PDL1 Immuno-STAT (IST)



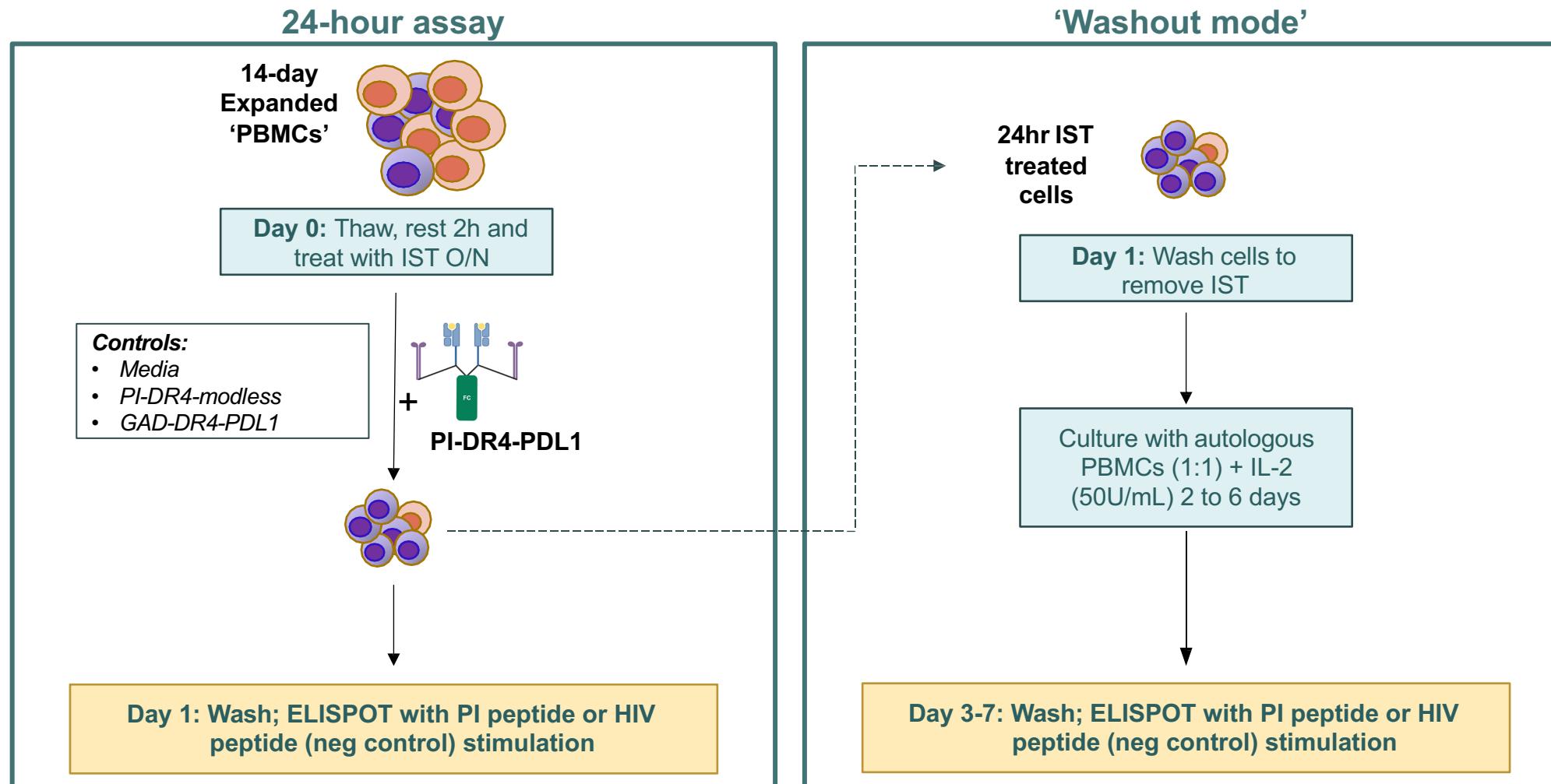
# PI-DR4-PDL1 IST Inhibits Expansion of Proinsulin-Specific T cells In Vitro



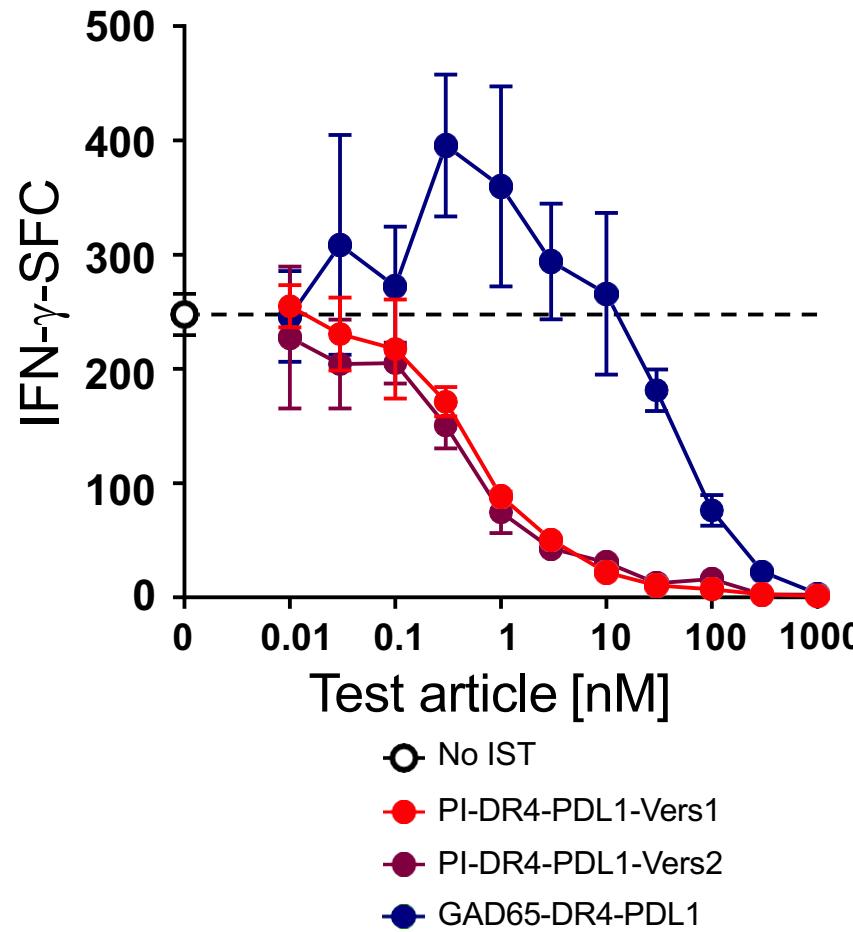
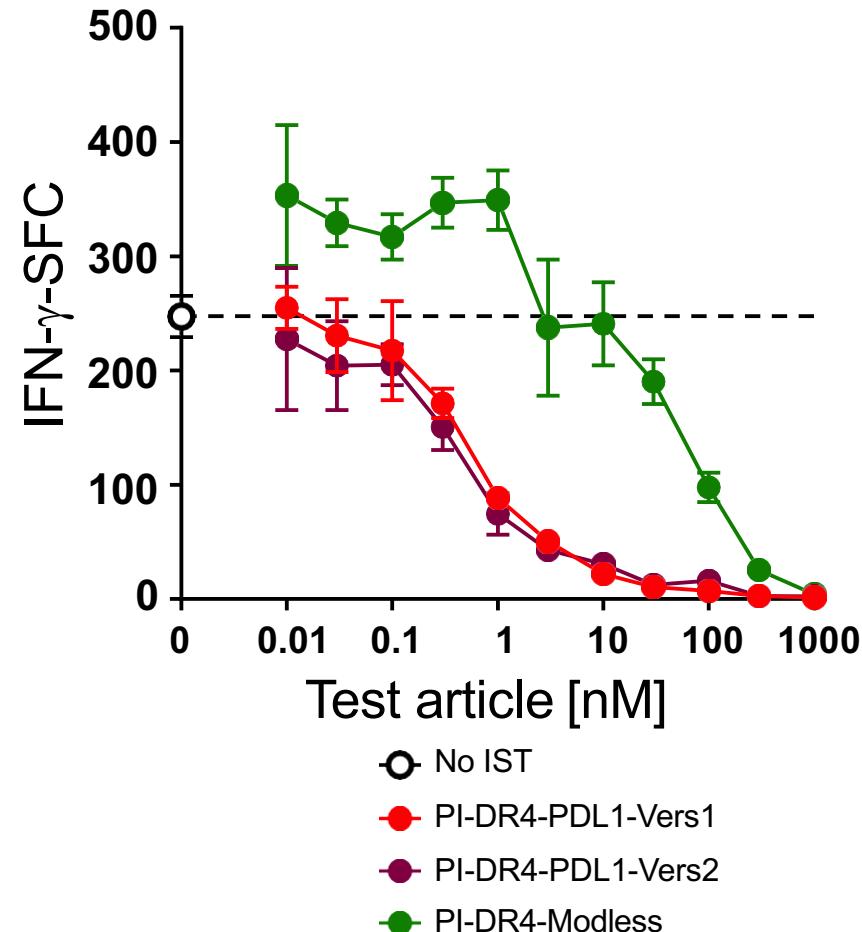
PI-DR4-PDL1 IST selectively inhibits antigen-specific CD4+  
T cells from T1D donor PBMCs

# Potency and Duration of Effect of PI-DR4-PDL1 ISTs In Vitro: In Vitro Assay Format #1

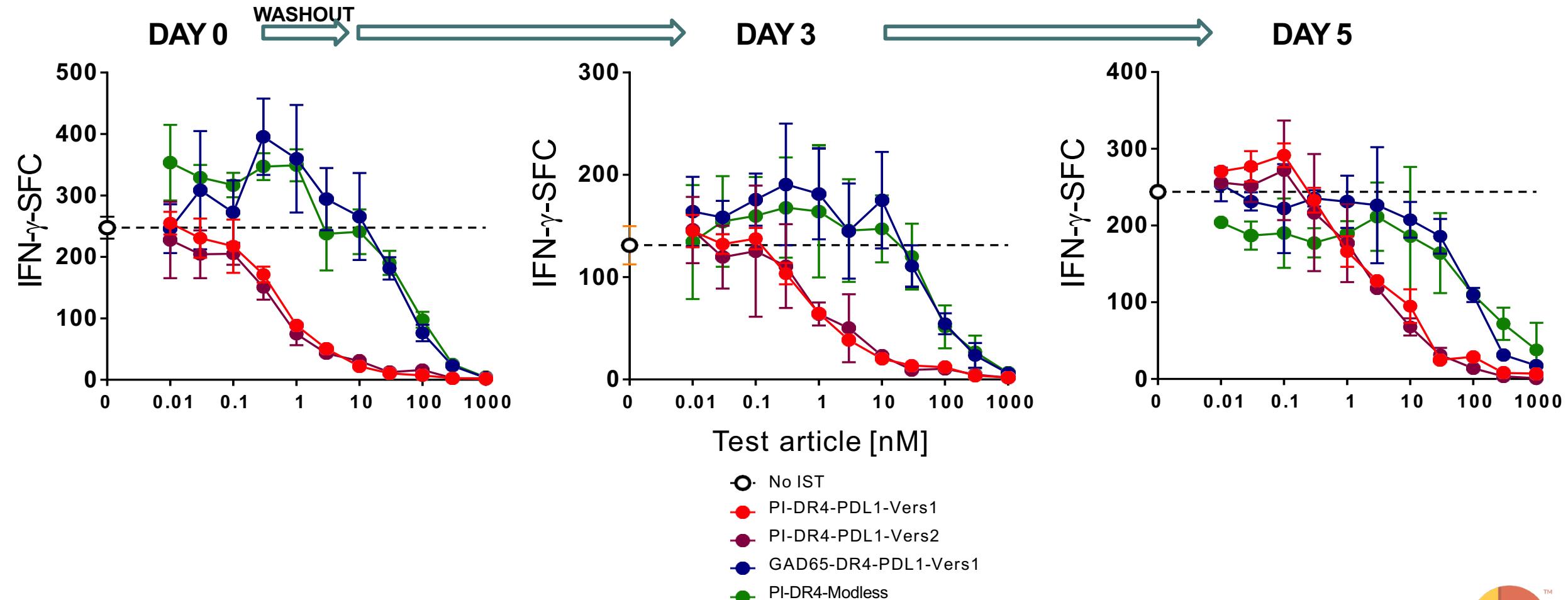
- Assays are based on PBMCs expanded for 14 days with peptide and rhIL-2



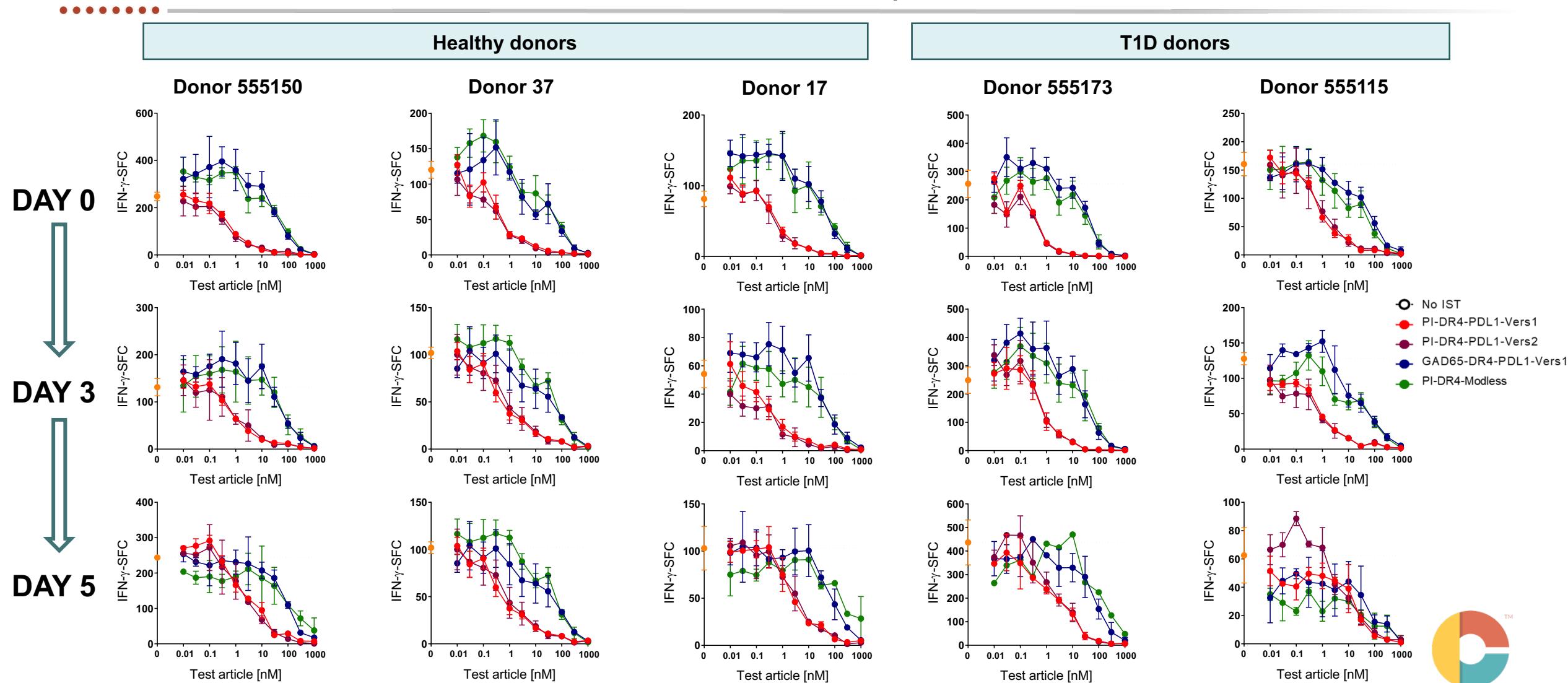
# Overnight Treatment with PI-PDL1 ISTs Inhibits Antigen-Specific CD4+ T Cell IFN- $\gamma$ -Responses in a PDL1-Dependent, Antigen-Specific Manner



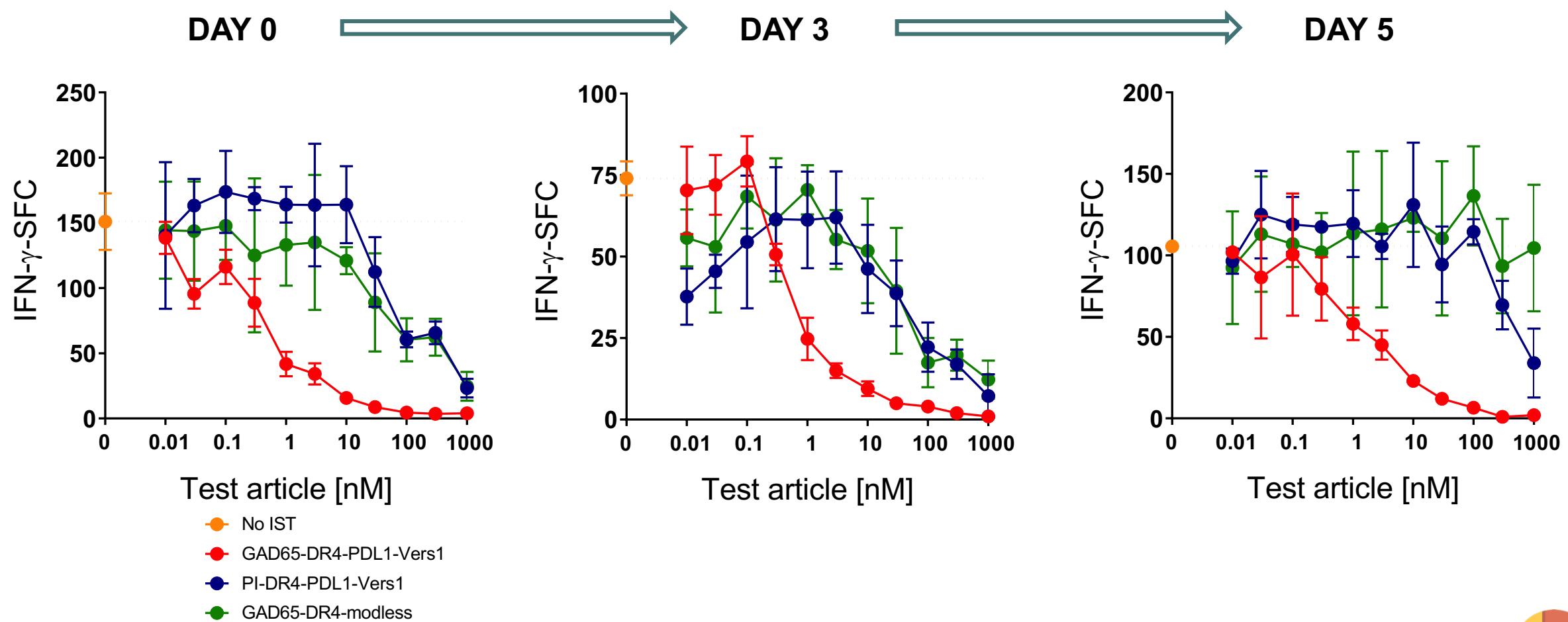
# Functional Responses of Proinsulin-Specific CD4+ T cells Remain Suppressed 3-5 Days Post Washout



# The Antigen-Specific, PDL1-Dependent Suppression of PI-Specific CD4+ T Cells is Observed Across Multiple Tested Donors

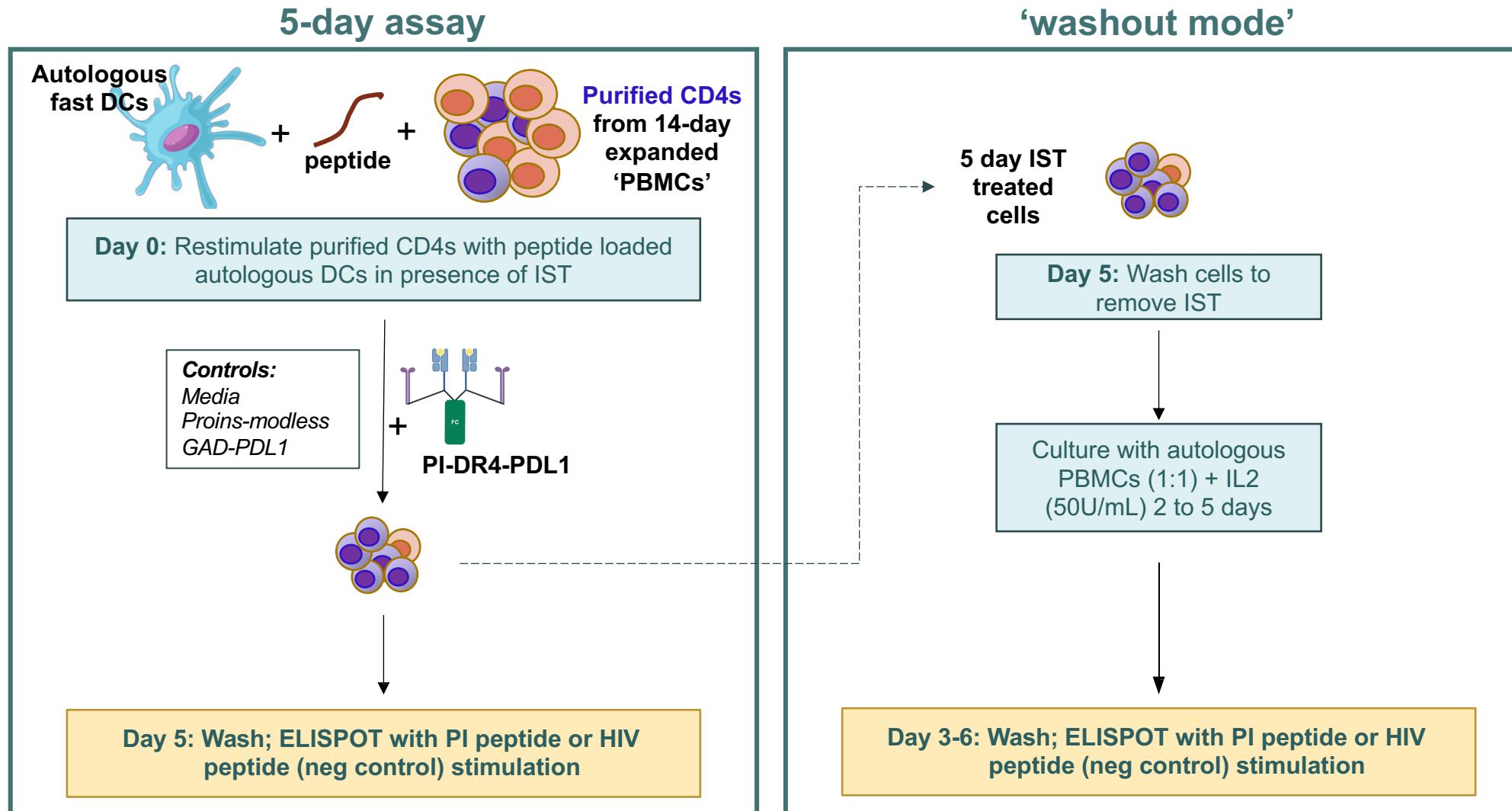


# Observed Mechanism is Not Unique to PI-PDL1: Similar Effect is Seen with GAD65-Specific Donors and a GAD65-PDL1 IST

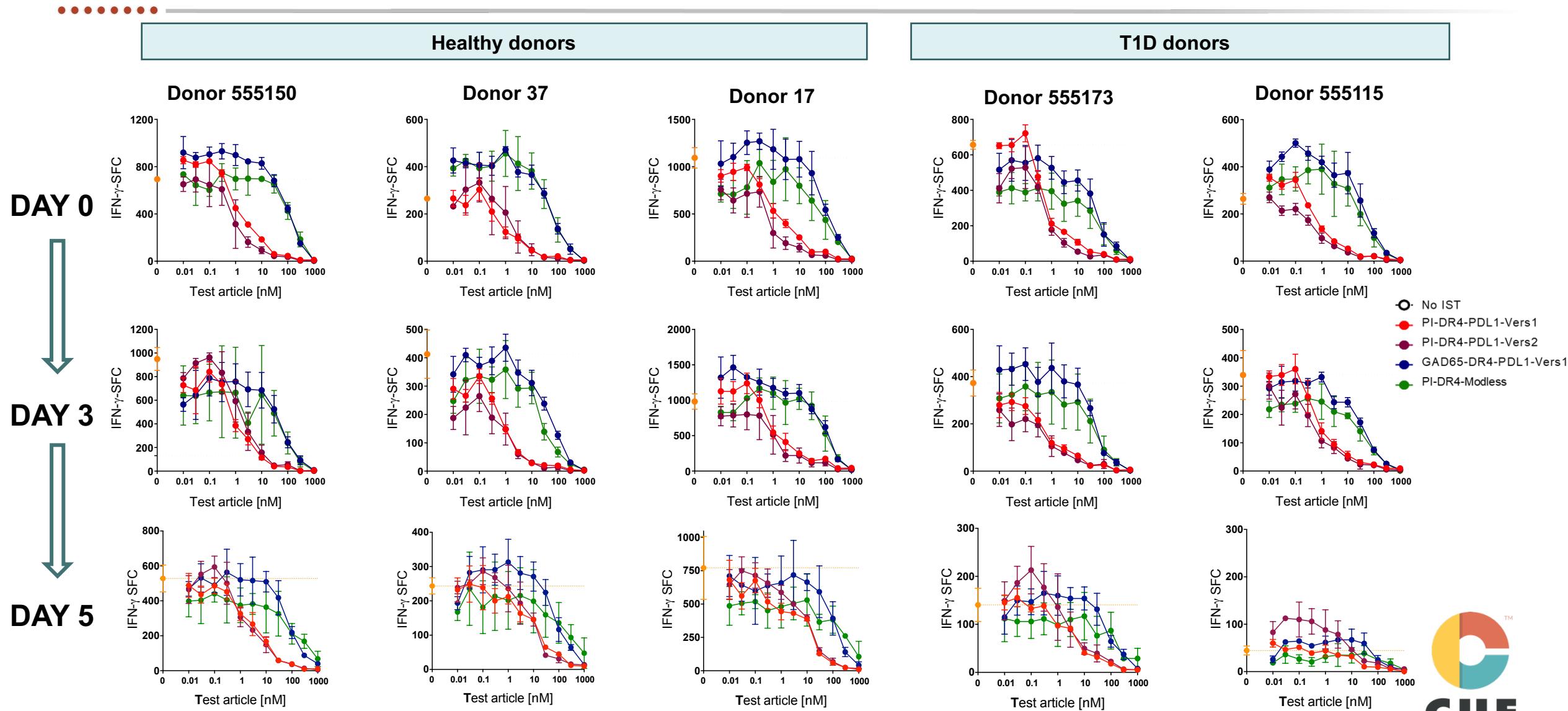


# Potency and Duration of Effect of PI-DR4-PDL1 ISTs In Vitro: In Vitro Assay Format #2

- All assays are based on CD4+ T cells expanded for 14 days with peptide and rhIL-2



# The Antigen-Specific, PDL1-Dependent Suppression of PI-Specific CD4+ T Cells is Observed Across Multiple Tested Donors



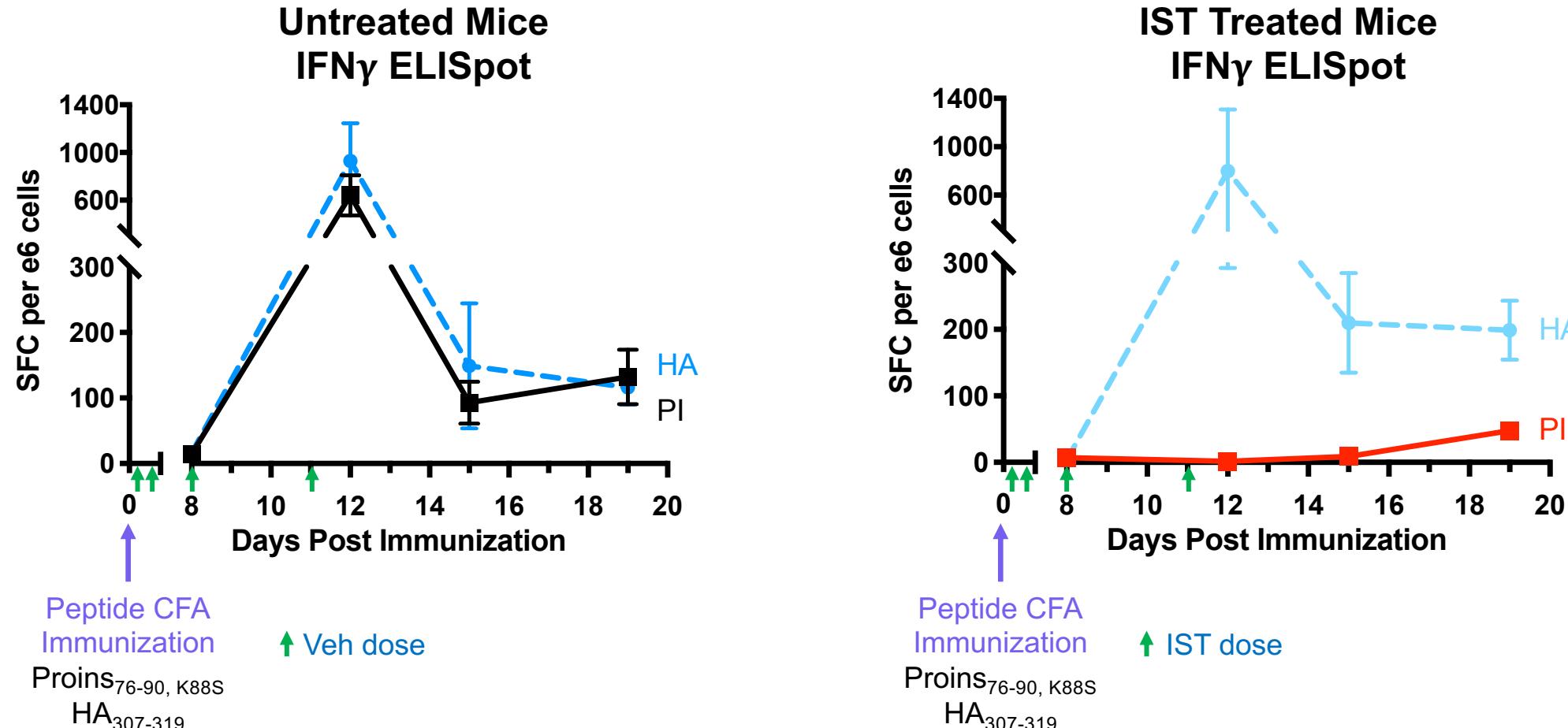
# In Vitro Study Conclusions

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- Functional responses of Proinsulin-specific CD4+ T cells are strongly suppressed by overnight PI-PDL1 IST treatment and remain suppressed at 3-5 days post-washout
- Functional responses of PI-specific CD4+ T cells re-stimulated for 5 days in the presence of PI-PDL1 ISTs are strongly suppressed and remain suppressed at 3 days post washout
- The observed effects are antigen-specific and PDL1-dependent and are observed across multiple tested donors (both healthy donors and T1D patients)
- Similar results are obtained with GAD65-specific CD4+ T cells treated with a GAD65-PDL1 IST → the mechanism and duration of PDL1-mod-induced suppression is not limited to a single antigen specificity



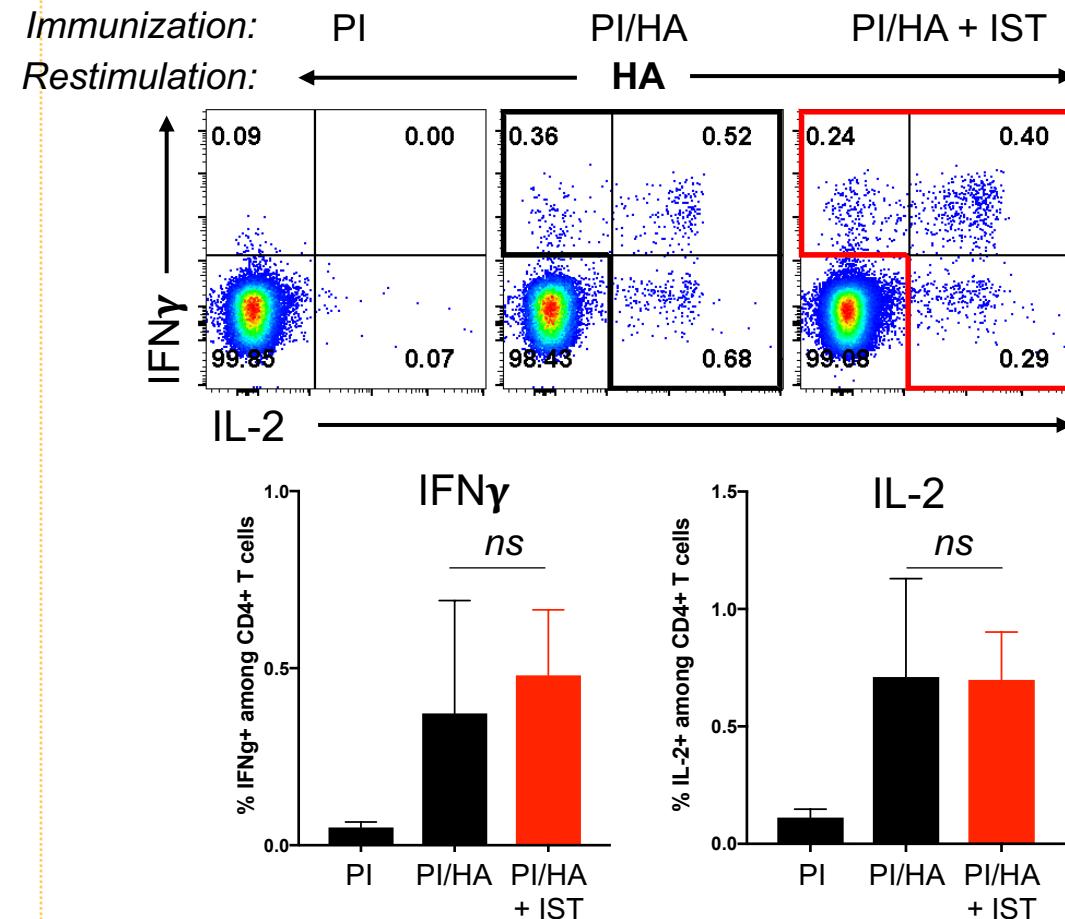
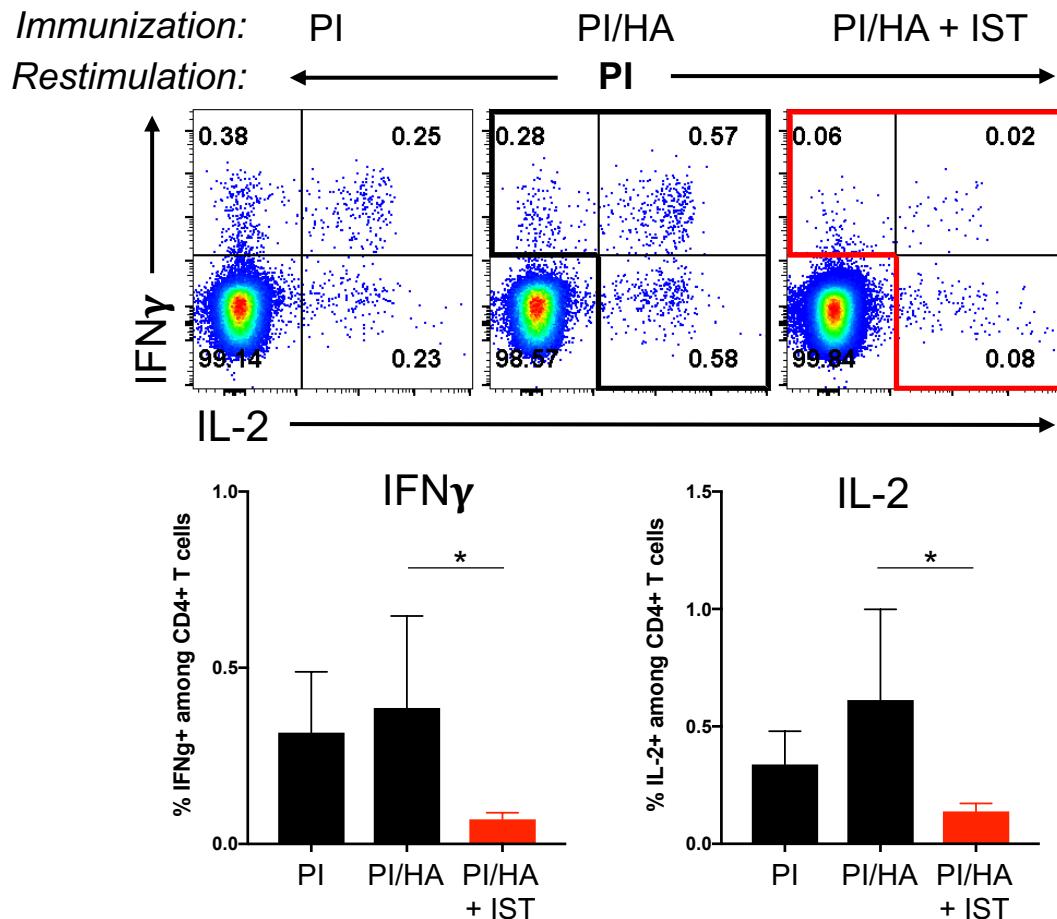
# Early Intervention with Immuno-STAT Selectively Reduces the Number of Proinsulin (PI) Responsive CD4+ T Cells in Transgenic Mice



Treatment with Proins-DR4-PDL1 IST starting on Day 1 post immunization selectively suppresses expansion of PI-reactive cells without inhibiting expansion of HA-reactive cells

# In Vivo Treatment with Proins<sub>76-90, K88S</sub>/DR4-PDL1 Immuno-STAT Suppresses Cytokine Production by Proins (PI)-Specific CD4+ T Cells

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Treatment with Proins-DR4-PDL1 IST suppresses cytokine production of PI-specific CD4+ T cells (IL2, IFN $\gamma$ , TNF $\alpha$ , IL-17) without affecting HA-reactive cells



# Late Intervention with Immuno-STAT Selectively Reduces the Number of Proins (PI) Responsive CD4+ T Cells In Vivo

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Day 0

Proins  
Response  
(IL-2)

Day 11

Veh →  
IST →

Day 12

Day 13

Peptide CFA  
Immunization  
Proins<sub>76-90, K88S</sub>  
HA<sub>307-319</sub>

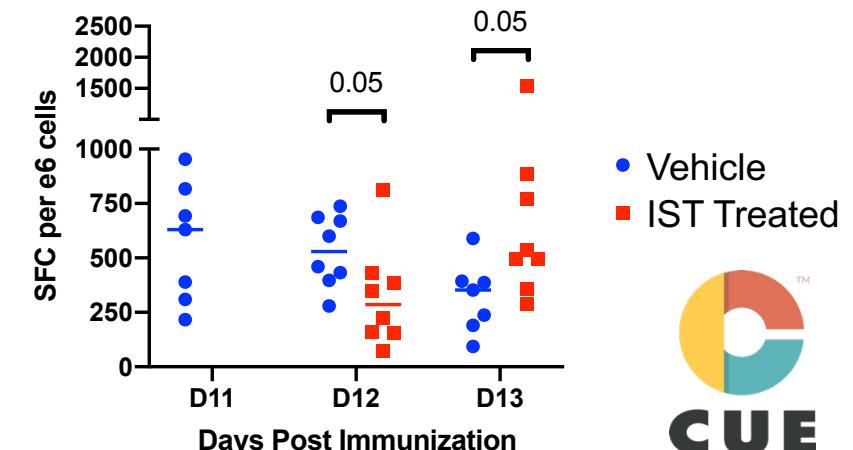
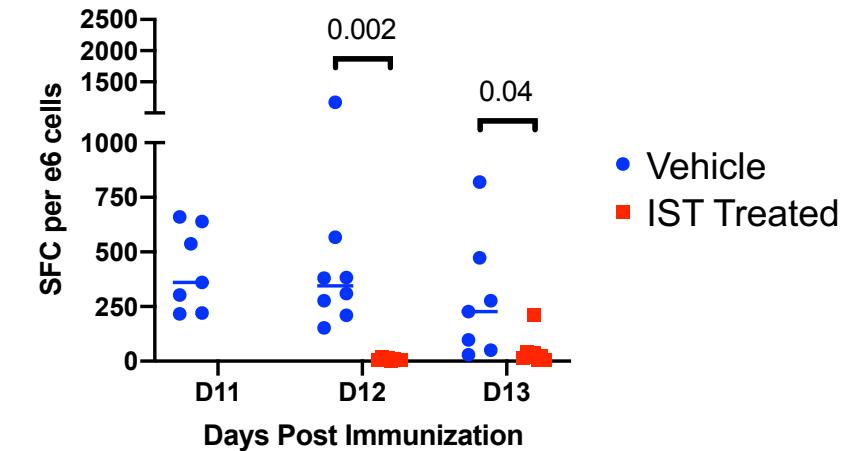
HA  
Response  
(IL-2)

Day 11

Veh →  
IST →

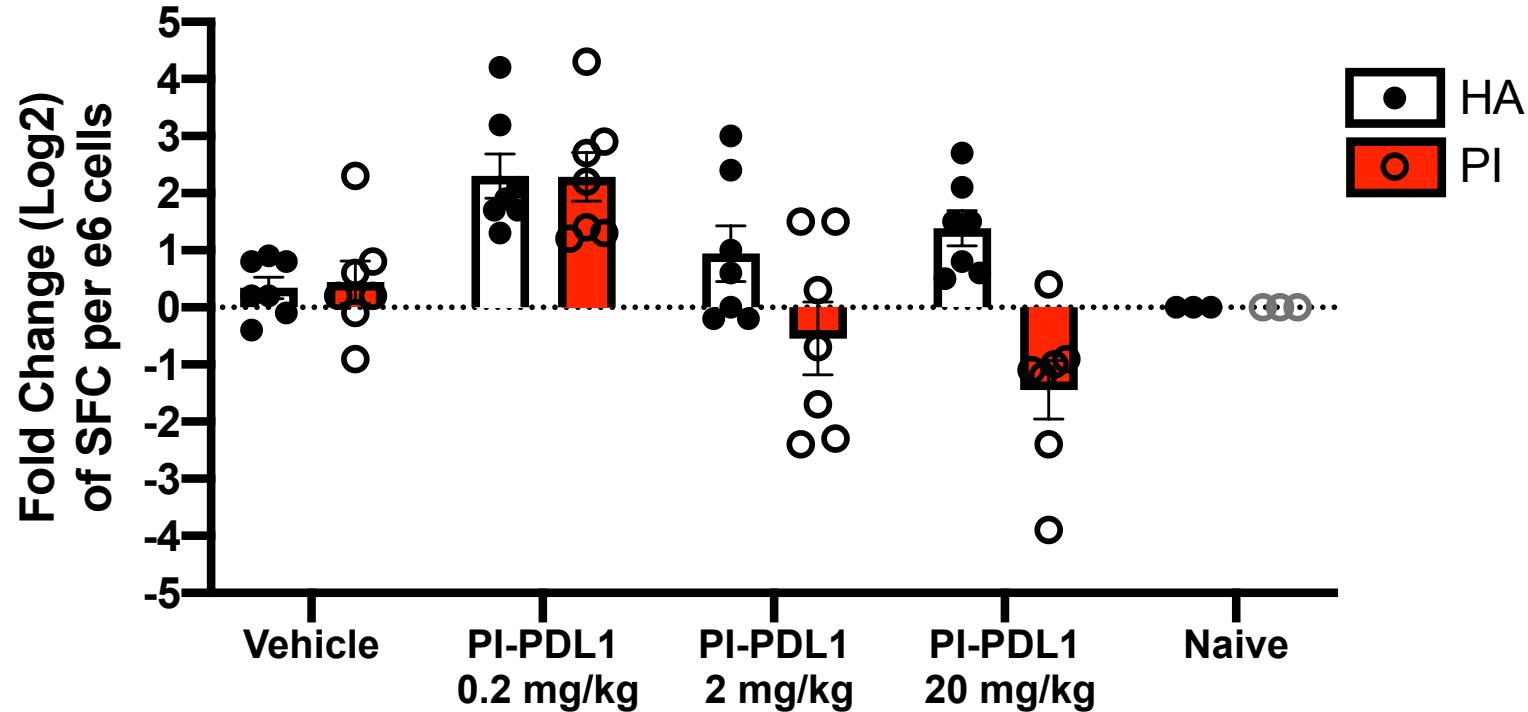
Day 12

Day 13



# Intra-Animal ELISpots Confirm Dose-Dependent and Antigen-Specific Suppression of Proins Response Following Single Administration of IST

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Mean ± SEM



- Per animal data confirms dose-dependent inhibition of Proins response relative to pre-dose
- Inhibition of HA response was not observed upon IST administration

## In Vivo Conclusions

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- Treatment with Proins<sub>76-90, K88S</sub>/DR4-PDL1 Immuno-STAT significantly suppressed expansion of Proins-specific CD4+ T cells in transgenic mice
- The effect of Proins<sub>76-90, K88S</sub>/DR4-PDL1 Immuno-STAT treatment was antigen specific as treatment did not result in a reduction of HA-specific CD4+ T cells
- A single in vivo administration of Proins<sub>76-90, K88S</sub>/DR4-PDL1 Immuno-STAT at the peak of immunization response significantly reduced the frequency of Proins-responsive T cells in a dose-dependent manner



# Overall Summary

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- Successful generation of Immuno-STAT molecules comprised of Class II HLA molecules (DRB1\*04) along with PDL1 inhibitory ligand to selectively dampen autoreactive CD4+ T cells
- Proins-DR4-PDL1 IST exhibits favorable in vitro stability and manufacturability
- Proins-DR4-PDL1 IST potently and selectively inhibits Proins-specific responses in expanded human PBMCs
  - Significant suppression is maintained at 96 hours after wash-out, confirming prolonged pharmacodynamic effect from IST exposure
- Proins-DR4-PDL1 IST selectively inhibits Proins-specific responses in vivo within 24 hours of administration
  - Dose-dependent activity was observed
  - Selective inhibition of Proins response was confirmed using 2 assay formats
- ProIns-DR4-PDL1 IST and the Immuno-STAT platform could provide a promising therapeutic option for T1D patients



# Acknowledgement

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- Merck Research Laboratories
- CUE Biopharma Protein Sciences, In Vitro Biology and In Vivo Pharmacology groups

