



ENRF Briefing Note on The Future of Health Research and Innovation after Horizon 2020

Research and innovation are crucial to reduce the increasing burden of major chronic diseases in European societies. Although the last decades have seen important advances in health research and innovation, there are still significant gaps in the understanding, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of these conditions.

The European Union plays an important role in supporting health research and innovation. Not only does it provide significant research funding, but also contributes to strengthening collaboration between researchers, universities and research centres across Europe, as well as between academy and industry. It also supports the training of researchers, fosters excellence in research, and actively promotes innovation, among other contributions.

The ongoing mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020, and the initial steps in the development of the next Research Framework Programme (2021-2027) represent a good opportunity to reflect on the EU (and Member States) support to health research and innovation as well as to discuss potential changes to implement in future EU research policy developments. The current Research Framework Programme Societal Challenge 1 (SC1) - Health, Demographic Change and Wellbeing mainly focuses on effective health promotion; successful efforts to prevent, detect early, manage, treat and cure disease; personalised medicine; a comprehensive approach toward poverty-related and neglected diseases.

Looking at its three core elements, it is possible to draw some interim evaluation:

- **Effectiveness:** SC1 is right on track to deliver on its objectives. The strengths lie in SC1 contribution to increasing knowledge with top scientific publication, to new and sustained collaborations; to leveraging research investments, stimulating innovation; to influence research policies and placing the EU a strong global player in health research. Some difficulties are still registered for clinical trials
- **Efficiency:** SC1 is a highly selective programme that implements an increasing budget with a decreasing number of staff and shorten time-to-grant and time-to-pay
- **Relevance:** SC1 is relevant, suited to current challenges and consistent with its legal basis

In parallel, we can detect some areas for improvement, such as underfunding, support for market-creating innovation, greater outreach for civil society. It is also important to limit the administrative burden: the Commission has already expressed its concern of not receiving the best applications because people do not invest in it. This trend can be prevented by increasing budget, narrow topics, work on the two stages process and increase the success rate for stage 2. In addition, more attention should be casted to the evaluation through the application of the excellence principle also apply to this step, with more transparency and better identification of appropriate evaluators.

In general, when developing a research proposal, it is key to base the project on excellence, openness and impact. In addition, [Researchfish](#) can be considered, a platform used by funders, institutions and researchers to track funding and outcomes.

Regarding the next steps, in 2017 the Commission will publish a Communication about: the overall conclusions on the evaluations results, the state of implementation of the FP7 ex-post HLEG recommendations, response to High Level Group recommendations, messages on Art. 185 and Art.187 initiatives. In 2018, the next Multiannual Financial Framework Commission proposal will be presented. In 2021, there will be the launch of the 9th Framework Programme.

When looking at the future of the EU Research Framework Programme FP9, it is important to pay attention to some elements:

- The **European Parliament engagement in research**. The European Parliament monitors the implementation of Horizon 2020, with the ITRE committee leading the work. In the last years, the EU has registered a very poor investment in development by Member States, therefore it becomes necessary to invest in how to share innovation and good practices across Europe. To increase the budget in the field of health research, it is important to inform about its need and about the cost of not supporting research. It is key to be active in finding supporters of your project and ideas.
- A **new health research approach**. In the last years, research has only focused on small pieces, while a holistic approach is needed, to look at the system as a whole. It is vital to look outside the boundaries of a clinical diagnosis and called for early diagnosis/ identification of biomarkers for prognosis and response to therapy; molecular reclassification of diseases; redefining clinical trials; definition of treatment response; drug repurposing.
- **The contribution of research to reduce the burden of chronic diseases**. WHO developed an [Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in the WHO Europe Region for 2016-2025](#) that focuses on research to promote the national capacity for high-quality research and prevention and control of NCDs, and the translation of high quality NCD into practice. Additionally, it is important to: address the substantial gap between research evidence and practice; remove barriers of access to effective intervention (prevention/treatment); reduce unneeded treatments. The Action Plan considers necessary to link health, occupational and socio-economic research.
- **Engagement of patients in research and innovation at EU level**. Policy-makers should consult patient organisations in the definition of research priorities, as well as universities and research institutes should engage patients in related research activities.
- **Challenges in health research** regarding funding, awareness of patients' involvement, bureaucracy.
- The **healthcare professionals' perspective**. The role of healthcare professionals, and especially nurses, has a great impact in the health promotion and prevention, providing early referral, timely and evidence-based treatment, education and information on self-management. Research led by health professionals needs more funding opportunities, and the EU programmes should make research-oriented careers more attractive.

More in general, the new framework FP9 should focus on interdisciplinary and collaborative research: the public private partnership in research and innovation is a relevant instrument for leverage money that can be facilitated through an increased patients' involvement, the Innovative Medicine Initiative funding under FP9, and a regulation supporting sharing of data. In addition, a balance needs to be found between more generic and more narrow call topics, that need to be interdisciplinary and innovative. In parallel, in order to overcome the challenges in transferring research findings and innovations into clinical practice, it is fundamental to facilitate the access to unbiased and high-quality research publications, and to funding for implementation of new drugs and further innovations. In this sense, for research centres it is important to develop a clear research focus, and implement a better communication of research results.

Conclusion

The next Research Framework Programme (2021-2027) represents a good opportunity to enhance the need for a further involvement and promotion of health professionals in the future of the EU health research and innovation policies. In this context, the role of ENRF is key to promote nursing research able to provide evidence-based health policies taking into account the full healthcare panorama.

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