

Research funding must focus on health

The Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe (Bio-Med Alliance) warmly welcomes the European Commission's Horizon 2020 proposal, the EU's funding instrument for research and innovation for the period 2014-20 ("Commission unveils €80bn research funding programme", 1-7 December). In particular, we welcome the increase of the overall research funding budget, which is all the more remarkable given the economic crisis.

However, we are very concerned about the decrease in the budget allocation for health research. In the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), 12% of the budget was allocated to health research; in Horizon 2020, the figure is 10%. This decrease is regrettable.

Healthcare costs are rising rapidly and, given the ageing of Europe's population, radically different approaches are urgently needed to bend the costs curve. Investment in biomedical research is essential if we are to tackle our many health challenges. We are already far behind our international competitors in getting organised and



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recognising the significant return on investment in this area.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), non-communicable diseases – a group of conditions that includes cardiovascular diseases, cancer, mental-health problems, diabetes mellitus, chronic respiratory disease and musculoskeletal conditions – are the cause of 86% of deaths

and 77% of the disease burden in the WHO's European regions.

Under status-quo prevention and treatment trends, estimates indicate that non-communicable diseases worldwide will cause an output loss of \$47 trillion (€35 trillion) over the next two decades. Yet such diseases are largely preventable and are linked by common risk factors, underlying great

opportunities for intervention through research advancements and research-informed policies.

The return on investment in medical research is significant, at around 39%, according to the UK's Medical Research Council. It could create employment and improve health, reducing the growing economic burdens Europe faces. Indeed, biomedical research clearly

meets the targets identified in the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Our view – and we represent around 200,000 biomedical researchers in Europe – is that 'health is wealth' and must be at the forefront of Horizon 2020, both strategically and financially. We believe that health research should receive 20%, rather than 10% of the

budget. With this, it would be possible to improve coordination of the fragmented health field in Europe, accelerate innovation and speed up the translation of discoveries into applications that will have an impact upon healthcare delivery.

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