Canada’s global health R&D

Canada’s global health R&D funding focuses mainly on HIV/AIDS

According to G-FINDER data, Canada’s funding for research and development (R&D) on poverty-related and neglected diseases (PRNDs), referred to as ‘global health R&D’ in this profile, stood at US$13 million in 2017. This represents an 89%-increase over 2016, when funding stood at US$7 million. Most of Canada’s financing for global health R&D went to basic research (US$6 million) and preventative vaccines (US$2 million). In 2017, funding focused primarily on HIV/AIDS (US$6 million), representing 44% of total Canadian global health R&D. Other focus areas included tuberculosis and kinetoplastids.

According to G-FINDER data, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) was the sole public funder for global health R&D in 2017, with around US$13 million (all global health R&D funding). CIHR is the Canadian government’s agency for health research, supervised by the Ministry of Health. CIHR comprises 13 institutes (see box). Within its support for global health R&D, CIHR provided support to various research and academic institutions in Australia, Canada, and the US in 2017. The main recipient for this funding is the University of British Columbia (US$5 million; 37% of all funding). These figures may differ from the trend numbers presented in the chart due to changes in the scope of the G-FINDER survey from year to year.

GAC and CIHR jointly lead decision-making on global health R&D

Responsibility for global health R&D policies and funding lies with GAC and CIHR, as well as the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Within CIHR, overall strategic directions are set by the Governing Council. The Science Council of CIHR is a management committee which develops and implements CIHR’s work. Within the three business portfolios—Research, Knowledge Translation and Ethics (RKTE); External Affairs and Business Development (EABD); and Resource Planning and Management (RPM)—RKTE is responsible for the administration of funding programs, including for global health R&D. CIHR is also guided by a Framework for International Relations and Cooperation (2006).

CIHR, IDRC, and GCC collaborate on several initiatives to advance global health research. This includes the Development Innovation Fund – Health (DIF-H). DIF-H is a consortium composed of the CIHR, IDRC, and Grand Challenges Canada (GCC; see details below). It was established by the Canadian government in 2008 with a pledge of CAD225 million (US$173 million) to support research relating to critical global health problems.

IDRC oversees DIF-H, while GCC is responsible for managing implementation of projects funded through the DIF-H. CIHR supports the DIF-H by peer-reviewing applications in response to grant calls issued by GCC. DIF-H’s three main objectives are to:

1. Identify and prioritize health challenges facing developing countries;

The 13 ‘virtual’ institutes of CIHR

- Ageing
- Cancer Research
- Circulatory and Respiratory Health
- Gender and Health
- Genetics
- Health Services and Policy Research
- Human Development, Child and Youth Health
- Indigenous Peoples’ Health
- Infection and Immunity
- Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis
- Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction
- Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes
- Population and Public Health

Further information: G-FINDER

G-FINDER is a data source developed by Policy Cures Research that provides information on global investments into R&D for neglected diseases. Figures in this section are based on the G-FINDER survey, which covers basic research and product-related R&D (drugs, vaccines, and diagnostics) for a select group of diseases. The G-FINDER scope has been defined by an expert committee, in line with three criteria: the disease disproportionately affects people in developing countries, there is a need for new products, and the commercial incentives are insufficient to attract R&D from private industry.

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2. mobilize scientific communities to address these challenges; and
3. facilitate the implementation and commercialization of solutions in developing countries.

GCC is an independent, not-for-profit organization established in 2009. It receives most of its funding from the Canadian government, including through the DIF-H. GCC funds ideas that integrate science, technology, and social and business innovation, with a “feminist investment approach”. Global health R&D is a theme cutting across the six specific challenges that GCC has chosen to work on:
1. ‘Stars in global health’, promoting the work of scientists and innovators;
2. transition to scale;
3. saving lives at birth;
4. saving brains;
5. global mental health; and

CIHR, IDRC, and GAC also jointly support the ‘Innovating for Maternal and Child Health in Africa’ program (CAD36 million from 2014 to 2020, US$28 million). The program supports Canadian and African research organizations around R&D on strengthening health systems. Priority areas include:
1. high impact, community-based interventions;
2. quality facility-based interventions;
3. policy environment; and
4. human resources for health.