The UK is the 2nd-largest public funder of global health R&D

In 2017, the UK provided US$186 million for product development for poverty-related and neglected diseases (PRNDs), referred to as ‘global health research and development (R&D)’ in this profile. These figures are based on the G-FINDER survey conducted by Policy Cures Research. This makes the UK the second-largest public funder of global health R&D after the US. Funding levels in 2017 were nearly double those in 2016 (US$98 million) and are likely to continue to rise, considering the priority given to R&D within the UK’s development strategy. 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.

Global health R&D is a focus of the UK’s development policy. However, the UK does not have a single strategy for global health R&D. Instead, responsibilities for global health R&D and related areas such as disease surveillance and epidemic response are dispersed across various government agencies and research institutions, with each establishing its own strategies. The most important institutions are the Department for International Development (DFID), the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and the Medical Research Council (MRC), a publicly funded organization to support research across areas within medical science. A joint DFID-Department of Health global health research working group began meeting in 2017 to coordinate ODA-funded research on global health. Alongside this, a Strategic Coherence of Official Development Assistance-funded Research Board (SCOR) was announced in September 2017, tasked with coordinating development priorities across all ODA-funded research.

In 2017, DFID managed 54% of spending on global health R&D (US$100 million, according to G-FINDER data), focusing on product development partnerships (PDPs) and delivery-related research. The MRC managed the second-largest portion of R&D funding (US$41 million or 22%), focusing primarily on basic and early clinical research, followed by the DHSC (US$40 million or 22%).

Other funds that are central to the UK’s global health R&D activities from 2016 to 2020 include the Ross Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund.

The Ross Fund (£1 billion for fiscal years 2016 to 2020, or US$1.3 billion) is a government portfolio of investments to support development, testing, and delivery of new health products related to antimicrobial resistance (AMR), neglected tropical diseases, and diseases with epidemic potential, such as Ebola. The Ross Fund portfolio is managed by two departments: DFID and DHSC. It includes the Fleming Fund (with £195 million, or US$251 million, in planned spending) seeks to strengthen surveillance on drug resistance and laboratory capacity in developing countries. The Ross Fund also comprises the new Global AMR Innovation Fund to encourage investments from government and the private sector into AMR-related research.

Another key funding instrument is the Global Challenges Research Fund (£1.5 billion, or US$1.9 billion, for FY2016/17 to FY2020/21) which supports cutting-edge research on challenges related to emerging vital threats in developing countries. The Fund’s work also extends beyond the scope of global health R&D.

Closely mirroring these priorities, the focus of UK global health R&D spending in 2017 was on combating malaria (US$58 million or 31%), tuberculosis (US$30 million or 16%), kinetoplastid diseases (US$25 million or 13%), and HIV/AIDS (US$14 million or 8%), according to G-FINDER data.

The UK regards PDPs as one of the most important instruments to advance global health R&D. Accordingly, more than half of the UK’s global health R&D funding in 2017 went to PDPs (US$107 million or 58%). Academic and
other research institutions received a combined US$41 million, or 22%.

**Research and Evidence Division leads on global health R&D policy within DFID**

DFID’s Research and Evidence Division manages DFID’s global health research portfolio, overseen by DFID’s chief scientific adviser and director of research. The Research and Evidence Division has an operational plan that sets out its vision and strategic priorities for a five-year period. Based on the operational plan, the Research and Evidence Division develops business cases for investments and commitments to specific research programs that are approved by DFID leadership. In addition, the MRC has a governing body (the Council) that decides on strategic and financial issues.