Global Health Technologies Coalition

Advancing innovation to save lives

How the US Government can improve coordination for global health research and development

Leveraging investments, fostering innovation, and improving product development to deliver new health technologies to those in need worldwide

As the largest supporter of global health research and development (R&D) in the world, the US government plays a leading role in the development and delivery of new health technologies—including vaccines, drugs, microbicides, diagnostics, and devices—to populations worldwide.

Global health research and innovation takes place across a variety of US government agencies and programs—each of which possess distinct priorities and unique expertise. Thus, effective coordination across agencies and programs is vital to ensuring US investments are used most efficiently and achieve the greatest possible impact for global health.

US government agencies and programs involved in global health R&D

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Department of Defense (DoD)
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- White House National Security Council (NSC)
- White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
- Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP)
- President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)
- Department of State
- US Agency for International Development (USAID)

The need for greater coordination

R&D is a key component of the US government's global health approach; however, there is currently no clear interagency strategy guiding the work being conducted and delineating divisions of labor across agencies and programs. Each agency sets priorities independently based on its own mandate. While there are a few examples of formal coordination across agencies, the majority of coordination occurs informally with specific program teams pursuing opportunities for collaboration.

Due to a lack of an interagency strategy and clear divisions of labor, crucial gaps exist in US programing for global health R&D including implementation of research, host country capacity building, and scaling of innovations. One of the possible consequences is that a potential breakthrough innovation may not make it from early-stage research in one agency to late-stage research in another. A lack of adequate funding also presents a challenge to sustaining and expanding existing programs to fill these gaps.

Recommendations for improving coordination across US agencies

To leverage US investments and fill existing gaps, it is critical that the US government pursue opportunities to improve coordination across agencies and programs. Recommendations include:

- **Develop an interagency strategy on global health R&D with clear divisions of labor and a funding mechanism for enforcement.**

The US government needs a strategy for global health R&D that is properly funded and includes a mandate for coordination. The strategy should be developed in collaboration with all agencies involved, but carried out by a lead office with a strong mandate for global health R&D and the capacity to bring other agencies together to align priorities.

- **Convene an annual meeting of agencies conducting global health R&D programs.** An annual meeting would provide a critical opportunity—as part of an interagency strategy—to share information and best practices across agencies and leverage resources. The White House OSTP is best positioned to convene and lead this meeting.

- **Create a clear map of US agencies' involvement in global health R&D.** Gaps in programming and opportunities for collaboration would be easier to identify if there were a publically available mechanism showing each agency's work in global health R&D. Agencies should buy into an existing program—like NIH's RePORTER—which tracks NIH-funded research. In the future, the United States should also participate in the Global R&D Observatory being developed by the World Health Organization which aims to track all global health R&D efforts.

- **Provide more funding for programs with existing mandates in global health R&D.** When agencies are mandated to address issues related to global health R&D, it is critical that these mandates be tied to adequate funding allocations. Gaps will continue to exist in global health R&D programs unless agencies have adequate and stable funding.

Case study in coordination: Chlorhexidine

The development of chlorhexidine—an intervention to reduce the development of infections in newborns—is an example of a successful collaboration across US government agencies involved in global health R&D.

USAID, in partnership with NIH and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, funded the first completed study of neonatal and umbilical cord care with chlorhexidine in infants in Nepal. It found a 24% reduction in neonatal mortality. Recognizing the potential, NIH and USAID convened a conference to discuss next steps for testing and scaling this potentially life-saving intervention.

Following the initial study, the Nepalese Ministry of Health approved a USAID-funded pilot program of chlorhexidine in four districts in the country. USAID country missions, ministries of health, and the local private sector collaborated on project implementation.

USAID is now helping fund the national scale-up program for chlorhexidine in Nepal and other countries. In support of this implementation, USAID and the United Nations Commodity Commission created and funded a working group to support chlorhexidine introduction activities in 15 countries.

As a result of this collaboration, experts say this lifesaving invention could potentially avert an estimated 500,000 neonatal deaths per year.

- **Restore funding for agency representatives to participate in scientific meetings and conferences.** Agency representatives indicate that a lack of funding for participation in scientific conferences is a serious hindrance to agency coordination and collaboration.

By implementing these recommendations, the US government can improve coordination across agencies, and as a result, leverage investments, foster innovation, and improve the development and delivery of new global health technologies to those in need worldwide.

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About the Global Health Technologies Coalition

The Global Health Technologies Coalition (GHTC) is a group of more than 25 nonprofit organizations working to increase awareness of the urgent need for tools that save lives in the developing world. These tools include new vaccines, drugs, microbicides, diagnostic tests, and other devices. The coalition advocates for increased and effective use of public resources, incentives to encourage private investment, and improved regulatory systems. Learn more at www.ghtcoalition.org.

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