
COVID-19 for R&D: Blessing or Curse?



This week Cancer Research UK has announced that it has cut funding to its research activities. At the same time, the EU is aiming to raise around €2 billion in support of rapid response research initiatives to fight COVID-19.

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Cancer Research UK is a fundraising charity that funds around 50% of cancer research in the UK, but receives no support from the government. In [an open letter](#), it has said that it faced an up to 25% cut (ie around €136 million, £120 million) to its income in the next financial year as a result of the coronavirus lockdown. Due to this it has had to cut funding by 5-10-20%, which equals to a €50 million (£44 million) cut to its research portfolio across the year. "These cuts are substantial and will set back the cancer research effort within the UK, potentially for many years," said CRUK in the letter.

If you want to share your experience and perspective on COVID-19, [please do](#).

On 3 April, the European Commission [adopted](#) an [amendment](#) extending the [Temporary Framework adopted on 19 March 2020](#) to "accelerate the research, testing and production of coronavirus relevant products, to protect jobs and to further support the economy in the context of the coronavirus outbreak." The amendment provides for additional five types of aid measures:

- Support for coronavirus related research and development (R&D)
- Support for the construction and upscaling of testing facilities
- Support for the production of products relevant to tackle the coronavirus outbreak
- Targeted support in the form of deferral of tax payments and/or suspensions of social security contributions
- Targeted support in the form of wage subsidies for employees

The [plan](#), presented by EU R&D commissioner Mariya Gabriel includes measures to increase capacity for vaccine testing, a [hackathon](#) competition, a new research task force, and freeing up computing power for COVID-19 research. There is also a possibility that EU member states may provide additional funding to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), an international body that is maintaining an overview of the global landscape of COVID-19 vaccine development activity. Earlier this year, CEPI published an estimate that [\\$2 billion](#) would be required to develop a vaccine against COVID-19. So far €633 million (\$690 million) has been [pledged](#) to CEPI by countries such as Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway and the UK.

The announcement of these plans coincided with the sudden resignation of the European Research Council President Mauro Ferrari who quit on 7 April, after just three months of holding the position. In his resignation letter, first [published](#) by the Financial Times, he cited "uncoordinated" COVID-19 response as the reason. The response by the Scientific Council of the ERC is available [here](#).

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