
CVD Research Funds: Where From? Where To?



Cardiovascular disease (CVD) - a grouping of diseases that affects the structure and/or function of the heart and blood vessels, including heart disease and stroke - is the number 1 killer in Europe claiming over 4 million lives in the Europe and 1.9 million lives per year in the European Union (EU). CVD is also estimated to cost the EU economy almost €196 billion a year. The rising life expectancy coupled with adverse trends in major cardiovascular risk factors could lead to a doubling in the absolute incidence of CVD by 2050.

The availability of adequate and effective funding is thus crucial to tackle the CVD burden by discovering innovative medical solutions. Yet, the CardioScape project reveals that funding for this area of research is not the highest. "Only" € 876 million was awarded for CVD research in the EU between 2010 and 2012.

Striking disparities also exist at national level in terms of both public and private research financing. In the UK, where research funds for CVD are highest, almost € 300 million were spent over the period 2010-2012. In the same years, Finnish funders only allocated € 800 000 to cardiovascular research.

Of course, wealthiest countries score highest in terms of funding. Regrettably, this means that the level of CVD research funding is inversely proportional to CVD mortality rates: Eastern and Central European countries, where CVD causes up to 50% of deaths have little if any funding available for cardiovascular research. For instance, in Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia and Lithuania no funding \geq € 100 000 per project was made available by funding bodies over the period 2010-2012.

CardioScape interestingly reveals that, though EU research funding represents a mere 5% of total investment by EU Member States in European R&D in all disciplines, the money spent by the EU FP7 for cardiovascular research in 2010-2012 - € 258 million – is far from being negligible and positions the European Commission among the top funding organisations in Europe together with the British Heart Foundation (€ 120 million) and the UK Wellcome Trust (€ 104 million). There are thus important complementarities between national and EU funding sources as the first support primarily research performed within national borders while the EU focuses on transnational projects.

In addition to sourcing information on research that has been previously undertaken in this area, the partners mapped available funding sources including grants, trusts, venture capital and angel funds, across all EU-28 countries; the aim being to establish the extent of duplication across national research programmes, identify funding gaps that reduce opportunities for innovation, highlight areas where coordination can be improved and define future funding priorities and strategies for CVD research in Europe.

This information, together with access to the CardioScape database populated with over 2400 projects from the EU28 Countries, will be made available to the public at the CardioScape conference in Brussels, on 17 September 2014. On this occasion, the European Society of Cardiology, project coordinator, together with PNO, project partner, will present the project findings along with recommendations for furthering the European research activity in this field. The event is open to medical professionals, academics and other stakeholders including medical research organisations with an interest in cardiology, and will also be attended by EU and national policy makers.

Acknowledging CardioScape's conclusion, Professor David Wood, the project's Scientific Coordinator, together with Professor Frans Van de Werf, Chair of the CardioScape Scientific Committee, said: "The results of the project will enable to comprehensively understand current cardiovascular research landscape in Europe. It will help encourage future collaboration between researchers, avoid duplication and assist funders to make informed decisions about where to invest their funds. Funding bodies and researchers are now encouraged to continue adding to the CardioScape database (www.cardioscape.eu) to inform others of their cardiovascular research and to look for partners. Ultimately, this will ensure that every Euro is efficiently invested to serve science and patients, and also to significantly contribute to a healthier and more productive European society."

Source: European Society of Cardiology

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