What is it?

The Global Observatory on Health Research and Development (R&D) is a centralized platform hosted at WHO that monitors and analyses what health R&D is being conducted globally, where it is being conducted, by whom and how. By doing this, the Observatory is able to identify R&D needs, which can guide research capacity building efforts and feed into global priority setting mechanisms so that new investments in R&D are driven by public health needs.

Why is it needed?

Globally, funding for R&D is scarce and at present not everyone in the world is able to benefit equally from the advances offered by health R&D. There are persistent gaps in the health R&D landscape, which result in the neglect of certain health issues, products and populations, particularly those living in low and middle-income countries.

To coordinate and use funds in the best possible way, funders and researchers need an accurate picture of the current state of play. Upon reaching its full potential, the Observatory will be able to provide a comprehensive and reliable map of research funding, ongoing research and results, making it possible to spot gaps, and to subsequently guide the allocation of new investments for the development of needed products and knowledge.

Where are we now?

The Observatory has made great progress since its inception to demonstrate its potential. It has brought together R&D data from existing sources; cleaned, harmonized and validated raw data into relevant information; and worked with IT to develop a user-friendly portal to give access to this information. The current Version of the portal includes:

10 R&D databases

- Investments
- Product Pipelines
- Clinical trials
- Publications
- Burden of Disease

Trends & Gaps

Standardized data

can be accessed

40 Health issues

- Neglected diseases
- HIV, TB, Malaria
- Antibiotic resistance

194 Member States
Where are we going?

Obtaining a comprehensive and reliable picture of health research worldwide that is helpful for priority setting processes is a challenge. First, data needs to be collated (and collected where unavailable), harmonized and translated into meaningful information. Then, the resulting information requires analyses to explain why the health R&D landscape is currently as is. Finally, the evidence derived from the exercise needs to be employed in priority setting processes so that these are evidence-driven.

The transition from data to evidence is however neither simple nor cheap. Relevant data is often not available and, when available, data is of varying quality, consistency and detail. Research and health issues are also classified in different ways in existing data sources, which makes comparability across sources and translation into information difficult. In order to move from information to evidence, health R&D needs must also be defined, a shift that requires close collaboration with experts in each specific health issue.

The Observatory has begun to address some of these challenges by, for instance, employing an iterative process of data validation and interrogation. Additional health issues and methodological advances are also being considered for upcoming versions of the Observatory, including machine learning and automated data mining.

The R&D Observatory has a clear added value in priority setting processes and efforts to build research capacity. Many important challenges remain. The World Health Organization is well-positioned to lead this initiative in collaboration with key stakeholders, including funders, existing data sources, and analysts. With these joint efforts, the Observatory will be able to reach its full potential, moving from data to evidence, and ultimately contributing to the prioritization and conduct of the health R&D that is needed.

Global Health R&D Observatory: http://www.who.int/research-observatory/portal/
For more information, please contact: rd-observatory@who.int