



FEAM position on the European Commission proposals on Horizon Europe

This position paper presents the views of the Federation of European Academies of Medicine (FEAM) on the European Commission proposals for a Regulation¹ and a Decision² on Horizon Europe, the new EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

FEAM welcomes the Commission proposals and believes that Horizon Europe will represent an important asset in contributing to research and innovation in Europe. However, FEAM would like to put forward several recommendations for the negotiators. These are meant to improve the proposals and the environment for biomedical and health research in Europe.

Recommendations:

- 1. Create a favourable ecosystem for health and biomedical research by:**
 - a. Maintaining a balance between fundamental and applied research**
 - b. Promoting transdisciplinarity**
 - c. Addressing the fragmented funding landscape**
- 2. Keep the programme “Open to the World” and facilitate the collaboration with Associated Countries**
- 3. Recognise the importance of precision medicine–based, patient-centred solutions in designing clinical trials**
- 4. Develop instruments to provide support to successful projects**

¹ COM(2018) 435 final, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-horizon-europe-regulation_en.pdf

² COM(2018) 436 final, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-horizon-europe-decision_en.pdf

1. Create a favourable ecosystem for health and biomedical research by:

a. Maintaining a balance between fundamental and applied research

It is important that all the three pillars in Horizon Europe (including the R&I missions) integrate both fundamental and applied research. Basic discovery science is an essential precondition for innovation. At a time of increasing attention to translational science, the Horizon Europe programme needs to maintain a strong commitment to basic, discovery science (investigator-driven, bottom up ideas). In parallel, support of multidisciplinary translational research is also essential to translate basic research into real clinical benefits.

b. Promoting transdisciplinarity

Across Europe many of the current funding programmes for research result in much of the academic community working “in silos”. This is inappropriate at a time when the complex challenges of health and biomedical research increasingly require a transdisciplinary approach. A growing number of disciplines (such as engineering) are more and more involved in healthcare and this requires new models of research collaboration.

A dedicated cluster on health (under pillar 2) is welcome as it will allow challenges specific to this area to be addressed. However, health should be an important dimension also in other clusters such as the ones focusing on climate, food safety, societal issues and digital technologies. In light of this, **the Horizon Europe proposals should facilitate synergies across the different clusters in pillar 2 and outline the measures envisaged to implement them. The programme should also include concrete steps to enable cross-pollination across the three pillars composing the programme.**

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) such as the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) are also important tools to help “breaking the silos”, allowing the combined skills of academia and industry to be harnessed. **The proposed Commission review of potential PPPs within Horizon Europe must be relevant to the biomedical/biopharmaceutical sector and early consultation with that community has to be anticipated.**

c. Addressing the fragmented funding landscape

Funding for clinical and health-related research to address unmet medical needs is fragmented within the European Union and across Member States. FEAM welcomes the intention of the Commission to create more synergies between Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) but the proposals remain vague on how this will be implemented.

It is also important to remember that a large part of health research is currently organised and funded at national level. **Horizon Europe should seek to establish synergies not only**

with EU programmes but also with national ones in order to achieve greater impact and better use of EU funding.

A possible solution to the fragmented funding landscape could be offered by the **European Council for Health Research**, proposed by the Scientific Panel for Health³ and supported by FEAM⁴. Its goals would be to implement long-term, sustainable research programmes and to exploit in full the benefits of coordination and cooperation across Europe, by acting as a proper funding mechanism and as a scientific advisory platform. **FEAM suggests that the European Commission explore this concept in depth (as well as its possible integration within the Horizon Europe programme) in consultation with the biomedical community and Member States' representatives.**

2. Keep the programme “Open to the World” and facilitate the collaboration with associated countries

Science (and the related development of science policy and advice) is recognised as a shared endeavour in which openness to contributions and collaboration with partners from across the globe plays a fundamental role. The establishment of an integrated European Research Area that is open to global research collaboration should be a key priority in Horizon Europe. **Horizon Europe should seek to be more accessible to research partners from across the globe, becoming truly “Open to the World”.** This would allow the EU to seize the opportunity to capitalise on the strengths and talents of a wider group of nations.

The programme should also recognise the important contribution of those countries with which the EU already has a strong and fruitful relationship in research and innovation. There must therefore be clarity on how “associated countries” will be defined and how inclusive such a definition will be. This will be an increasingly important issue in, for example, ensuring the continued and effective participation of such a research-intensive country as Switzerland but also in the context of the future role of the UK following the planned “Brexit”.

The value that the associated countries add to the programme should be reflected in their ability to fully participate in all pillars and all actions of the programme. Furthermore, the mechanism by which associated countries are able to contribute relevant scientific expertise to discussions over the priorities of the programme should be clarified.

A number of further queries concerning the status of associated countries need to be addressed as a matter of priority including what will constitute a fair balance between contributions and benefits for associated countries and how their financial contribution will be calculated. Finally, further detail is needed on the nature of the security agreements that

³ “Building the future of health research. Proposal for a European Council for Health Research. A consensus document of the H2020 Scientific Panel for Health”, 15 May 2018.

⁴ FEAM-BioMed Alliance position paper on “Strengthening biomedical research for the benefit of European citizens”, September 2017, https://www.feam.eu/wp-content/uploads/JointStatement_StrengtheningBiomedicalResearchInEurope_September2017.pdf

will be required between the EU and any third country and the possibility that this may preclude their participation in certain aspects of the programme.

3. Recognise the importance of precision medicine–based, patient-centred solutions in designing clinical trials

In describing the areas of intervention within the health cluster of Horizon Europe, the Commission highlights that non-communicable diseases call for more effective approaches, including personalised medicine approaches. In its joint position paper⁵ with BioMed Alliance, FEAM already called for a recognition of the importance of personalised medicine. In this context, FEAM also highlighted the growing need for independent academic investigator-driven "not-for-profit" clinical studies. Whilst the role of commercially-focused late phase clinical studies is acknowledged, there is a crucial need for obtaining follow-up data from independent longer-term studies.

It is very much hoped that Horizon Europe will bring solutions to this challenge. The Strategic planning process (under which the Commission in cooperation with other European institutions and stakeholders will lay out a multiannual strategy for developing the work programme of Horizon Europe) could offer a space to discuss this issue. The academic and other biomedical communities should be part of this process and appropriately consulted.

4. Develop instruments to provide support to successful projects

Many projects funded under Horizon 2020 and previous framework programmes have contributed to important scientific advances. However, sustainability has been recognised as a clear limitation: many networks were disbanded or lacked necessary funding to continue their research after the end of the EU funding period. This also created unnecessary duplications and waste of resources, with new networks and projects having to be formed over and over again. The Horizon Europe proposal fails to address this problem. The proposed reinforced focus on exploitation, helping beneficiaries to find the most appropriate instruments and channels for market uptake of their innovation, will not be sufficient to increase sustainability and might divert resources and efforts that could be channelled into other more useful directions.

For example, **appropriate instruments should be created in Horizon Europe to extend funding of projects which have accomplished unique results and which need to be continued to maximise the potential of real successes and innovation.**

⁵ FEAM-BioMed Alliance position paper on “Strengthening biomedical research for the benefit of European citizens”, September 2017, https://www.feam.eu/wp-content/uploads/JointStatement_StrengtheningBiomedicalResearchInEurope_September2017.pdf

FEAM – the Federation of European Academies of Medicine

FEAM's mission is to promote cooperation between national Academies of Medicine and Medical Sections of Academies of Sciences in Europe; to provide them with a platform to formulate their collective voice on matters concerning human and animal medicine, biomedical research, education, and health with a European dimension; and to extend to the European authorities the advisory role that they exercise in their own countries on those matters.

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