



## Position Paper

# Support hematology research in Horizon 2020

Today, an estimated 80 million European citizens are affected by blood disorders, both malignant ('blood cancers') and non-malignant (e.g. anemia, hemophilia). Not only the impact on patients, also the societal cost is immense: the economic burden of blood disorders amounts to €23 billion per year<sup>1</sup>. Hematology research plays a key role in improving patients' quality of life while helping bring down these costs. The European Union contribution is fundamental to fully unleash this potential.

The European Hematology Association (EHA) therefore calls upon the European Commission to tackle the burden of blood disorders by supporting research in hematology under Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

To achieve this goal, EHA recommends to:

1. Improve funding opportunities for research in hematology
2. Put forward seven research priorities to tackle urgent unmet clinical and scientific needs
3. Integrate researchers' feedback to enhance Horizon 2020 future implementation

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<sup>1</sup> Burns R, Luengo-Fernandez R, Sullivan R, Leal J. Economic burden of malignant blood disorders across Europe: a population-based cost analysis. *Lancet Haematol* 2016 <http://press.thelancet.com/Haem1.pdf> ; Luengo-Fernandez R, Burns R, Leal J. Economic burden of non-malignant blood disorders across Europe: a population-based cost analysis. *Lancet Haematol* 2016 <http://press.thelancet.com/Haem2.pdf>



## 1. Improve funding opportunities for research in hematology

Hematology research has fundamentally improved our understanding of the biology and clinical impact of blood disorders and has ameliorated diagnostics and treatments, sometimes in revolutionary ways. The impact of hematology research extends far beyond its discipline as important advances in this field were applied to other medical areas including oncology and cardiology. But still, more remains to be discovered. Despite important progress made, many blood disorders still remain incurable and are associated with loss of productivity, morbidity and premature mortality.

**At European level, current public spending on hematology research does not match this existing vast medical need.**

Indeed, of the €6.1 billion that the European Union allocated to health research under its 7th Framework Programme (2007-2013), only 2.2% (€137 million) was granted to hematology research. That was less than 0.1% of the societal cost of blood disorders in Europe during that same period. The current programme, Horizon 2020, has been spared from major budget cuts. However, raising support for hematology research remains a work in progress.

EHA calls upon the European Commission to improve funding opportunities for hematology research within the current framework programme Horizon 2020. This is crucial to maintain hematology research on the cutting-edge for the benefit of European patients and the society as a whole.

## 2. Put forward seven research priorities to tackle urgent unmet clinical and scientific needs

Besides the justified need to improve research opportunities in hematology, there is also the necessity to address the most urgent clinical and scientific needs. For this purpose, in February 2016, EHA published the Roadmap for European Hematology Research<sup>2</sup>, which provides state-of-the-art knowledge on hematology research and brings consensus about the priority areas for the next 5-10 years. These are:

1. Developing novel targeted therapies based on genome profiling and chemical biology;
2. Unleashing the power of cellular immunotherapy;

<sup>2</sup> Engert A, Balduini C, Brand A, et al The European Hematology Association Roadmap for European Hematology Research: a consensus document. *Haematologica*.2016; 101(2):115-208.



3. Eradicating minimal residual disease (MRD) in hematologic malignancies;
4. Creating smarter combination treatments;
5. Developing better tolerated treatments for blood disorders with a special emphasis on elderly patients;
6. Using gene therapy to tackle blood disorders;
7. Maximizing the clinical application of hematopoietic stem cells (HSCs) for transfusion, immunomodulation, and repair.

EHA calls upon the European Commission to take into account this seven unmet needs in the development of future research work programmes and calls for proposals.

### 3. Integrate researchers' feedback to enhance Horizon 2020 future implementation

EHA welcomes the Commission's efforts in simplifying procedures under Horizon 2020. However, based on the results of a survey carried out in partnership with the Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe, EHA would like to provide constructive feedback on some aspects that clearly need improvement:

#### **Consider scope reduction**

EHA welcomes the challenge-based approach in Horizon 2020 as opposed to a more prescriptive approach in FP7 as this allows for cross-fertilization of disciplines. However, EHA recommends finding a balance between these two systems. Broader scope leads to an increase in the number of applications and therefore higher rejection rates. This prevents many researchers from applying.

#### **Ease administrative burden in the application phase**

While acknowledging progress in making the implementation of granted actions less burdensome, researchers still consider administrative requirements excessive in the application phase.

#### **Privilege two-stage submission scheme**

Two-stage submission scheme encourages more mature proposals to be put forward. However, there is a need to make sure that only the most promising proposals will be granted access to the second stage.



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### Improve evaluation

Challenge-based approach adopted in Horizon 2020 brought up some issues regarding sound assessment of proposals. Within such approach it is indeed challenging to find evaluators who have enough scientific expertise in all the fields addressed by project propositions. EHA recommends involving evaluators who have expertise in hematology when proposals in this area are submitted.

Seizing the opportunity offered by the upcoming interim evaluation of Horizon 2020, EHA calls upon the European Commission to integrate researchers' experience and feedback to improve implementation of the current research programme.

## About EHA

The European Hematology Association (EHA) is a not-for-profit membership organization that promotes excellence in patient care, research and education in hematology. EHA's Annual Congress is attended by some 10,000 delegates. The association also publishes *Haematologica*, Europe's primary hematology journal. Being the leading hematology organization in Europe, EHA represents the interests of the discipline, its clinicians and its scientists in Europe.

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