Medical research and development – a prerequisite for dealing with future threats to heath

Agenda report 2021 – summary

The pandemic that started in 2020 has shown that our society is very vulnerable to unpredicted outbreaks of new diseases. Healthcare, medical research and development are at the front line when it comes to managing and combating a pandemic. Great efforts have been made during the Covid-pandemic, but it has also become clear that Sweden's regulations, healthcare and systems for health data are not adapted for today's global health challenges.

Research!Sweden and the member organizations in "Agenda for Health and Prosperity" have analyzed the possibilities to conduct and make use of medical research during the pandemic. As representatives of healthcare, academia, industry, patients and other interest organisations, we have been able to put together a reality-based "lessons learned" that we present in a report.

Based on the analysis, we have developed policy proposals to strengthen Sweden's preparedness for future health threats. Overall, we conclude that there must be more efficient systems in place to take greater advantage of medical research and development during a crisis. We must strengthen research and maintain the new abilities to collaborate, which were established during the pandemic. This makes us better prepared for upcoming threats to health such as viruses, and we will simultaneously be able to accelerate the development of treatments for other diseases.

Agenda för hälsa och välstånd – ett samarbete mellan FORSKA SVERIGE FÖR HÄLSA OCH VÄLSTÅND och:

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10 prioritized policy proposals to better benefit from research and development, to be able to handle future threats to health – a summary

1. A resilient research environment is required to be able to cope with future unknown crises

Being prepared unknown health threats requires a platform of broad basic research. Long-term investments in research and innovation programs and in clinical research are also needed. Research infrastructures, such as high-tech platforms that enable advanced analyses, also need long-term funding and coordination. They need to be accessible to healthcare professionals and researchers throughout the country.

1.1 Increase funding for independent research and identify knowledge gaps

1.2 Increase long-term funding, coordination and national availability of research infrastructure.

2. Sharing of health data must function in a crisis as well as in normal situations

interoperability of health data is required to act effectively in a health crisis. Patients, healthcare providers, researchers and companies must be given better opportunities to contribute to the collection, usage and sharing of data and samples, and it must be done in an ethical, safe and structured manner. This need has become obvious during the pandemic. The authorities need to set up national standards and frameworks for interoperability so that health data can be used in crisis-situations as well as in everyday conditions to increase quality, equality, and safety in healthcare.

2.1 Create and implement a national action plan for health data

2.2 Update the regulatory framework for health data

3. Research within healthcare must be secured

There must be enough research expertise within healthcare so that, in a crisis, they can carry out early research studies and quickly generate new knowledge, giving patients the best possible care. The research mission in healthcare must be strengthened and there is a need for planning and mapping of how staffing in health and medical care should be dimensioned to protect the research capacity.

3.1 Strengthen the overall staffing to protect research

3.2 Strengthen the research expertise

4. It must be possible to conduct clinical studies during a crisis

It is of utmost importance that clinical studies can start as soon as possible as a crisis arise. That way new knowledge can be passed on and be of real use in healthcare, for example by giving patients access to novel and potentially effective treatments.

4.1 Create systems that enable quick build-up of registers in the event of a crisis

4.2 Introduce national standards and make the approval process for clinical studies more efficient

4.3 Enable clinical studies off site

4.4 Facilitate for citizens to participate in clinical studies

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