

The Brazilian Ministry of Health and science, technology, and innovation policy

The Brazilian science, technology, and innovation sector has made significant strides in recent years, creating new prospects in the scientific community, as expressed by the latter's growing intellectual output and significant presence in the international scenario. Despite the difficulties and obstacles, important initiatives have been taken in the area of research promotion, aimed at overcoming these barriers and fostering further development of the most recent measures (although much remains to be done). Along with the virtuous structures for supporting the development of science, technology, and innovation, with a track record of more than five decades, the proposal to create specific Sector Funds has been an important contribution to this important effort by the technological and scientific community.

The health field is traditionally important, with some one-third of Brazil's scientific output, and has made successful efforts and initiatives in keeping with the overall trend, with special emphasis on measures undertaken recently by the Ministry of Health (MoH). The underlying principle is that "Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy in Health is part of National Health Policy". In keeping with the drafting, implementation, and monitoring of "Health Research Priorities" and responding to the need to create a Science and Technology Secretariat within the MoH, all the resolutions adopted by the 1st National Conference on Science and Technology in Health (1994) and reiterated during the 2nd National Conference on Science, Technology, and Innovation in Health (2004), the creation of the MoH Department of Science and Technology (DECIT) and later (2003) that of the MoH Secretariat for Science, Technology, and Strategic Inputs were major strides towards reestablishing the historical and necessary link between the Science/Technology and Health fields in policy leadership. The MoH thus displays its significant and highly respected presence at the various levels responsible for developing Science, Technology, and Innovation, such as the current Administration's Health Sector Fund, Biotechnology Sector Fund, and various Industrial Policy implementation levels, particularly in the partnership between the MoH and the Ministry of Science and Technology and its agencies (the National Research Council, or CNPq, and the Funding Agency for Studies and Research, or FINEP), as well as the various State Research Foundations.

Beginning in 2003, the MoH launched new financing and policymaking initiatives. In the two-year period 2004-2005, the MoH disbursed some R\$ 130 million or approximately US\$ 60 million to finance health research projects in the main relevant Brazilian research institutions. The corresponding budget for 2006 is R\$ 80 million (some US\$36 million), or an increase of 10% over 2005. As a result of this action, a substantial portion of the priority research agenda has already been met through public calls for projects with broad participation by the scientific community. All of the links in the knowledge chain were included. Of all the fields, Collective Health has been present in all of the respective bids, showing significant participation (representing 37% of the projects financed during the period).

All this reflects a virtuous trend, despite the occasional obstacles. The scientific community's favorable stance, as expressed in the 3rd National Conference on Science, Technology, and Innovation (2005), as well as that of health services managers and users suggests that this new MoH policy should be continued. The policy will have to be improved and intensified, which speaks in favor of the proposal to create an agency linked to the MoH, although with some operational autonomy, which can coordinate and monitor health research policy implementation, particularly in the area of research promotion. This alone is nothing new, since leading countries in health research around the world already have such agencies, as exemplified by the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

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