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# Health and Medical Research in New Zealand

Health Research Observatory

Bruce Scoggins

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4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2612  
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# Summary

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## Summary: Key Points

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- Government expenditure on health research in 2006–2007 was \$136 million (estimate), equivalent to 1.28% of government expenditure on health and 17.2% of expenditure on R&D
- Significant funding, \$25 million (estimate) in 2006–2007 was also provided by quasi government agencies, NGOs, and charities
- Growth in government funding for health research over the past five years has increased little in real terms after adjustment for payment of overheads
- Most funding is allocated to investigator-initiated research via a contestable process that uses peer review to meet agency requirements of science merit and relevance
- The two universities with medical schools (Auckland and Otago) are the main providers of well-cited and high-quality health research
- Research “by Maori for Maori” and “by Pacific for Pacific” are priorities for the Health Research Council
- Research training awards are well supported
- Health-related biotechnology is a growing and well-performing sector, supporting many innovative companies

New Zealand has a small health research sector from both national and international perspectives, which is regarded on the basis of citation analysis, bibliometrics, and peer review as being a high-performing sector of the NZ science system. Government, through various investment agencies, is the major funder, with an expenditure of \$136.0 million in 2006–2007. Part of the NZ government’s education budget also contributes through its investment in Centres of Research Excellence and support of academic institutions.

These funds (\$136.0 million) were equivalent to 1.28 percent of total government expenditure on health in 2006–2007. All funds were allocated through contestable processes by use of international best practice peer review for assessment of science merit and agency relevance criteria where appropriate. Significant investment also comes from quasi government agencies, several regional research foundations, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and charities. Overall in 2006–2007, approximately \$25.0 million was expended on basic, strategic, and applied health research funded by these organisations.

The main agency that deals with health, the Health Research Council of New Zealand, together with the government ministries, develop the national health research strategy. Although the majority of investment goes towards investigator-initiated research, there is an increasing requirement for research to be relevant to the government’s health priorities and for increasing investment to provide research training for future scientists. All research proposals receive peer review to meet international best practice standards.

Certain areas of research are given particular attention in New Zealand. Because of inequalities of health outcomes in people of Maori and Pacific origin, investment in research that is “by Maori for Maori” and “by Pacific for Pacific” are priorities.

Health-related biotechnology in New Zealand is a small but growing sector, mainly comprised of private companies, but it does receive significant government funding. Health research is primarily carried out in tertiary education institutions with the majority being conducted at the two main universities (Auckland and Otago). NZ health research is well cited and is recognised internationally as being of high quality. Several research teams are world leading.

With little growth in funding in real terms over recent years, New Zealand has not been able to build research capacity in important research portfolio areas (e.g. health policy and systems research, communicable diseases). Current investments are dominated by biomedical research projects, which, although they are of high quality, are not meeting the knowledge needs of the health sector.