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DOCUMENTED
BRIEFING

Health and Medical Research in Spain

Health Research Observatory

Fragiskos Archontakis

Prepared as part of RAND Europe's Health Research Observatory Documented Briefing series, funded by the UK Department of Health

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Summary

Summary: Key Points

- Key funders of health R&D in Spain are industry, central government, and the local governments of the autonomous communities
- Important role of Carlos III Health Institute as a funds manager and of the Spanish National Research Council as a research driver
- R&D funding in Spain has increased year on year, and health R&D funding is also increasing as a percentage of total funding
- The INGENIO 2010 initiative includes a series of policies and strategic actions
- Research productivity (as measured by publications) has been increasing in biomedical sciences
- There are still some challenges for the future

This documented briefing provides an overview of health and medical research in Spain. It does so by providing an account of the main players, the funding flows within the research and development (R&D) system in general, and the health research system in particular, and various aspects of process and performance, including research priorities and evaluation of research.

The main funding sources of the Spanish health research system are industry (pharmaceutical and biomedical), central government (mostly through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science), and the local governments of the 17 autonomous communities.

The Carlos III Health Institute, under the aegis of Ministry of Health, was created in 1986 by the Health Law as a scientific and technical support body for the Spanish National Health System. This public research organisation is responsible for the funding and management of competitive health research calls, i.e. it is an intramural research centre and provides external competitive funding. The Spanish National Research Council is the main fund recipient for basic research in Spain, undertaking research for health and biomedical sciences (amongst other fields). University hospitals are also among the main fund recipients for research in health and biomedical sciences.

The INGENIO 2010 initiative is the main policy vehicle to shift "the policy mix" in Spain towards higher quality research and innovation in the business sector. In addition to introducing new measures, it intends to complement initiatives contemplated in the

Spanish National Research Plan approved in the past with an aim to improve Spanish competitiveness. Under INGENIO 2010, the central government has almost doubled public funds to support R&D and innovation. The government expects that general R&D expenditure will reach the 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) target by 2010. In practice, it proposes a number of instruments to increase the focus (via priority areas) and funding of government research, stimulate technology transfer by encouraging public–private partnerships and enhancing the incentives for private-sector research and diffusion of new technologies.

Research funding in Spain has been increasing in absolute terms and as a percentage of the country's GDP. In addition, health research funding has been increasing as a percentage of total R&D funding.

Spain has been doing relatively well in terms of research productivity during the past few years. Publications in international peer-reviewed journals have been rising and, in particular, publications in biomedical sciences have been rising as a percentage of total Spanish publications.

There are several challenging issues that can contribute to improvement of the Spanish health research system in the near future: to increase R&D funding, especially that coming from private initiative; to identify reasons of the so-called brain drain of young researchers; to consider the reform of university hospitals in Spain and increase the number of biomedical research institutions; to create a clear professional career for the biomedical researcher; and to increase the numbers of medical doctors who divide their activity between practice and research. In summary, there is a need for sufficient funding, a well-defined professional career structure for researchers, and an increase in the number of research institutions.