

Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and major diseases at the same time

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Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and major diseases at the same time Credit: Helmholtz Zentrum München / Charlie Padgett

The world is currently facing a global pandemic without precedent. Looking at how leading research organizations and scientists across all disciplines are actively redeploying efforts to help identify and implement solutions is encouraging and exciting to observe, the authors

of the commentary say.

"This does not mean, however, that we may lose sight of the challenges we are already facing and which are responsible for threatening the lives and quality of lives of billions of people. Delaying or putting at risk decades of intensive basic, translational and [clinical research](#) would be a risky course of action which may end up having the opposite effect," warns Prof. Matthias Tschöp, CEO at Helmholtz Zentrum München. "It is the duty of the [research community](#) to face the total of all current and future threats in a responsible and sustainable manner. We need to adjust the way we work together and take our learnings from the corona pandemic."

The threat of major diseases is growing

The commentary refers in particular to [chronic diseases](#), such as diabetes and cancer, which remain leading causes of death and disability. For example, type 2 diabetes affects more than 400 million people worldwide today, and the closely correlated cardiovascular diseases remain the main cause of death in Western societies. Similarly, the number of newly-diagnosed cancer patients will increase annually from 18 million today to approximately 30 million in the year 2040.

Opportunities must be taken

According to the authors, the COVID-19 crisis has already changed the research community. Some of these changes and adaptations can be used to improve how we deal with other health challenges. International research teams are working together rather than in competition—across organizations, disciplines and borders. Regulatory bodies have accelerated their processing, and the sharing of critical data has been faster than ever.

"Based on what we have learned during the current COVID-19 crisis, smart, lasting, balanced and joint investments in improving our health as one global society are warranted. Ideally, all areas of biomedical research should benefit from this shift and be careful not to take a step back on our journey to prevent and eradicate many of the largest health threats worldwide," says Prof. Eleftheria Zeggini, Director of the Institute for Translational Genomics at Helmholtz Zentrum München.

More information: Eleftheria Zeggini et al, Biomedical Research Goes Viral: Dangers and Opportunities, *Cell* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cell.2020.05.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2020.05.014)

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