

Many countries still lack a health research strategy

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Although there has been a steady increase in medical research from low- and middle- income countries in recent decades, there are still many countries that lack anything resembling a health research strategy, according to international experts writing in this week's *PLoS Medicine*.

In [anticipation](#) of the upcoming World Health Report on the need for [health research](#), Martin McKee from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK and colleagues make the case for the importance of establishing national health research strategies so that public health systems can function and thrive.

The authors argue that efforts to strengthen capacity in health research have to date concentrated on countries where there is existing capacity rather than those where it is almost completely lacking.

The authors reached this conclusion by assessing the health research capacity of countries between 1996 and 2010 by measuring the number of [medical research](#) publications by researchers based in institutions in each country.

When using absolute numbers of scientific papers, the authors found that those with the fewest are mainly small islands and a few countries that are politically isolated. However, when assessing by the number of published papers per capita, the authors found that countries with the lowest number of medical publications included those in the former Soviet Union and Africa-both regions which, in recent years, have experienced declines in life expectancy, and conflict.

The authors argue that donors should take a long-term view and consider how best to build [health](#) research capacity where it is virtually absent. The authors say: "Notwithstanding the current global financial crisis, there is an argument to be made for leading donors to explore the scope for strategic

investment in higher education in some countries that have so far been neglected."

The authors add: "Obvious emerging priorities are those [countries](#) of North Africa that are in the process of transitioning to democratic rule, and where research capacity has, so far, been very limited."

More information: McKee M, Stuckler D, Basu S (2012) Where There Is No Health Research: What Can Be Done to Fill the Global Gaps in Health Research? *PLoS Med* 9(4): e1001209.
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