



PRESS RELEASE

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Thematic Public Report

RESEARCH IN INFECTIOLOGY

A major challenge that is not sufficiently managed

Dedicated to diseases long considered to be treated by the antibiotic and vaccine response, or confined to developing countries, infectious diseases research has returned to the forefront. In this report, the Court of Accounts focuses on the resources allocated to research in infectiology, as well as its management and coordination. While the SARS-CoV-2 health crisis has reminded us that emerging infectious diseases constitute a universal threat, it has also highlighted the lack of preparation, anticipation and priority given by France to the fight against these diseases. While French research had succeeded in demonstrating its success in the fight against AIDS, particularly in terms of coordination and funding, the rest of research in infectiology did not benefit from the same structures, despite signs of early warning consisting of recurrent epidemic episodes at the global level (such as H1N1 and Ebola). To ensure that research on infectious diseases can ultimately be made a national priority, the Court makes five audit recommendations.

Renowned infectiology research but insufficient priority given to emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases

In international rankings, French research in infectiology is at a very honourable level. However, and despite the recurrence of epidemic episodes over the past twenty years, no structuring movement in the field of infectious diseases has been initiated. Indeed, infectious diseases research has not been able to rapidly produce a vaccine or drug prophylaxis against Covid-19. Moreover, the overall funding granted to this research is not subject to any specific monitoring by the ministries responsible for research and health. While there has been a slight increase in this area - around 14% between 2015 and 2020 - these resources have not been the subject of a marked priority.

Weaknesses in terms of management and attractiveness of the research profession

Like the rest of biomedical research, research in infectiology suffers from insufficient management of the many stakeholders involved. The plurality of research organisations, each of which has its own computer-based systems and management rules, makes the coordination of research units more complex. This complexity, also fuelled by the growing share of calls for projects, directly affects the work of researchers. The latter devote a reduced amount of time to research, which, combined with remuneration at a lower level than the standards of



comparable countries, reduces the attractiveness of French laboratories. If the reaction of French research in infectiology at the time of the health crisis was rapid, the absence of strategic management led to a dispersion of funding and clinical trials, to the detriment of the most promising projects - as pointed out by the Court in the flash audit of July 2021 devoted to the funding of public research in the fight against the pandemic.

A transition between research and innovation hampered by the lack of coordination of stakeholders and the lack of maturity of the public-private ecosystem

The continuum between basic research, clinical research and innovation is still insufficiently developed. The links between public research and industry must be improved. Above all, the transition from research to therapeutic innovation encounters a specific difficulty in the infectiology sector: infectious diseases, concentrated in low-income countries, suffer from a lack of interest on the part of industrialists, for lack of profitable business model. In addition, research into breakthroughs should be encouraged.

Strengthen the management, resources and coordination of research on infectious diseases

The Court considers that the extension of the scope of jurisdiction, carried out in January 2021, of the ANRS (National Agency for Research on AIDS and Viral Hepatitis) to emerging infectious diseases (ANRS-MIE) constitutes a first response to the lack of coordination of funding and projects during the health crisis. However, this extension must go hand in hand with the granting, marking and traceability of a permanent and constant financial allocation for the exercise of this expanded mission and, in the long term, with the attribution of the role of leader of research in infectiology to this organisation. Lastly, the role of the future health innovation agency appears essential to encourage public and private investment in research on emerging infectious diseases.

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