



COVID-19 RESEARCH IN LOW AND MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES

29 & 30 MARCH 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

Objectives

- Discuss emerging research findings and ongoing research activity on COVID-19 across low and middle income countries (LMICs).
- Identify important obstacles (including persistent research system gaps), and both unmet and emerging research priorities for COVID-19 in LMICs.
- Identify what has worked and how to enable cross-setting learning for ongoing response & future research preparedness for epidemics.

Scope

This meeting will bring together global research funders, including those who are funding research on COVID-19 within low- and middle-income countries, with the community of researchers who are actively undertaking this research across LMICs and further stakeholders.

It is envisaged that sharing of information on progress, barriers and outstanding gaps between researchers, research funders and wider stakeholders will contribute to facilitating a collective effort to end COVID-19, while taking the tremendous indirect impact of the other health conditions and mortality into account in particular in LMICs, and leave no one behind.

This meeting builds on previous GloPID-R Synergies meetings on 'Long COVID'; 'Vaccines'; 'Therapeutics'; 'Social Science' and 'Preparing for a Second Wave: understanding transmission and how to stop it' as well as the series of WHO R&D Blueprint meetings. This meeting's scope is distinct due to its focus on identifying both specific immediate research priorities and persistent research system gaps for COVID-19 and learning for future epidemics in resource-limited contexts. Ideally, the information exchange at this meeting may lead to novel collaborations among researchers in LMICs to further align and improve research preparedness for future epidemics.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented global research response. Global coherence of research is essential to ensure it can inform real-time context-specific policy. Whilst many research questions are globally applicable, context-specific research is also vitally important. In some resource-limited settings, research has built from existing capacity from responding to previous epidemics and needs to be strengthened and sustained to address future outbreaks.

GloPID-R and UKCDR have been collaborating through the COVID CIRCLE initiative to promote coherent funding efforts, connect networks of researchers, and collate learning to inform future epidemic and pandemic responses with a focus on lower-resource settings.

Through this collaboration, GloPID-R has now established a working group that will support a coordinated approach for research funding towards epidemic and pandemic situations in LMICs, also beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the pandemic, COVID CIRCLE aligned research funders to [a set of principles for supporting high-quality research for the most pressing global needs in epidemics and pandemics](#) and helped identify [context-specific research priorities for LMICs](#) (in collaboration with the African Academy of Sciences and The Global Health Network). Throughout the pandemic, [the UKCDR and GloPID-R COVID-19 research tracker](#) has mapped the global research funding response and recent [analyses](#) continue to highlight huge unmet research needs across LMICs.

The [COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition](#) was created in April 2020 in response to concerns that the research needs of low-resource settings were not being prioritized or considered in the global response to COVID-19. [Coalition members](#) are researchers, clinicians, research and healthcare institutions as well as government and non-profit entities who have committed to accelerating COVID-19 research where the needs are greatest; leveraging each other's expertise to fast-track research that will provide the evidence needed to guide policy and practice in resource-limited settings; share knowledge and data; and champion equitable and affordable access to proven interventions. Its [expert working groups](#) are building on the work of other organizations in identifying the most pressing research priorities and gaps, leading projects on solutions to research barriers, and catalysing research collaborations to fill gaps.

The pandemic dynamics and research response are rapidly evolving, and now emerging vaccines pose urgent equity and access challenges, meaning the need for greater focus on LMICs is as urgent as ever. We need to collaborate globally now. We also need to learn from the research response to COVID-19 to inform future research system preparedness priorities.

MEETING THEME: LEARNING AND SYNERGIES FROM COVID-19 RESEARCH IN LMICS

Each day we will explore case studies from different settings across the session themes to enable cross-cutting learning. Particular focus will be given to how well existing research structures have pivoted and what are the remaining barriers to research.

Monday 29 March 12:00 - 16:00 BST

Opening session - introductions to partners; review of the funding and research landscape and work on research priorities to date.

Clinical research networks & clinical research

Operational issues: What are the barriers and how might they be overcome? How can they become more productive of generalisable and clinically relevant results? How to translate research results into practice? How to better inform stakeholders about research results? How have clinical research networks have pivoted (e.g. Zika networks); research, ethics and access issues; trialling vaccines and therapeutics that can be easily integrated in LMIC settings.

Health systems and indirect health impacts of public health interventions, at system and community levels e.g. including on other infectious diseases (e.g. HIV, TB, malaria); role of CHWs; and vaccine access and hesitancy.

Tuesday 30 March 12:00 - 16:00 BST

One Health

Research on the human-animal interface; surveillance; preparedness.

Transmission

Diagnostics suitable for remote & underserved populations; monitoring, sequencing capacity; new variants; social and ethical considerations.

Closing session - focussing on lessons learnt, persistent research systems gaps, research priorities and actionable next steps.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

Each of the sessions will be recorded and made publicly available through the partner websites. A brief meeting report will be published capturing key emerging themes, expected to include:

- Specific and immediate research priorities for COVID-19 in resource-limited contexts.
- Cross-cutting learning from successful rapid research in resource-limited contexts.
- Identification of persistent gaps and systems learning for ongoing and future research preparedness needs.

