Wellcome’s Response to COVID-19

Timothy Jinks PhD
Head Drug Resistant Infections Priority Area
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How Wellcome Trust has been working to support the COVID-19 response

Wellcome have been working to outsmart epidemics of infectious disease for many years.

The COVID-19 global crisis demands a global response which leaves no country behind.

Research is the only exit strategy from the pandemic – and the outcomes of that research must be made available everywhere.

Since January, Wellcome have pulled together four workstreams to drive this ambition:

1. **Research funding** to understand and tackle COVID-19, its effects on people’s lives, and its impact on society.

2. **Partnerships** to accelerate development of treatments and vaccines to beat the virus, and advise influential stakeholders.

3. **Policy and advocacy**, to make sure necessary commitments, resources and research are available and implemented immediately to tackle pressing issues.

4. **Communications** to drive these ambitions and call for sustainable change that will leave us better prepared for the next pandemic.
1. Research Funding

- We already provide **support for preparedness** initiatives – so our grantees, like ARTIC, ISARIC and SSHAP, were able to make an immediate impact.
- In February we pledged £10m for a joint funding call with DFID, who pledged another £5m.
- Our call focused on benefit for low-and-middle income countries (LMICs), and on immediate impact.
- The **projects we funded** include:
  - Boosting testing capacity in Malawi, through our long-standing clinical research programme there.
  - Detecting the prevalence of the virus in communities in Africa and South East Asia.
  - Monitoring how the virus changes through transmission.
  - Examining how the immune system responds to coronaviruses.
  - Investigating how the virus affects people with HIV.
  - Understanding the social and economic impacts in LMICs.
2. Partnerships

- The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations is funding 8 vaccine candidates, one of which is in Phase I trials in the USA and South Korea. We’re a long-standing advocate and funder of CEPI.

- We’ve launched the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, with extra support from MasterCard and other philanthropists.
  - First, it aims to help identify existing therapeutics that can prevent COVID-19 or stop it developing into severe cases: and help manufacturers and regulators bring 100 million courses of them onto the market in 2020.
  - Longer-term, it will help identify therapeutics that work against SARS-CoV-2 and the ways it manifests as COVID-19.

- We provide technical advice to the UK Government on their response, including disease surveillance and testing.
3. Policy & Advocacy

On our own, Wellcome cannot provide anything like the scale of resources needed to beat this pandemic.

In March we launched a call for governments, multilateral agencies and businesses to invest at least $8 billion in the global response, now.

Most of this is for:

- **COVID-19 Response Solidarity Fund** for WHO, to coordinate the world’s operational and R&D response.
- **CEPI**, to develop vaccines and accelerate manufacturing.
- **COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator**, for treatments.
- **FIND**, for rapid and point-of-care diagnostic tests.

The UK and German governments and others have provided hundreds of millions to CEPI and the Therapeutics Accelerator.

The European Commission have launched a global pledging initiative for R&D funding, 4-23 May. This is structured around the $8bn ask, and targeted towards donor governments.

Wellcome is advocating for global equitable access to be central to the R&D effort, and supports the WHO’s framing of an Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator.
4. Communications

Comms are developing persuasive, tailored messaging online and in leading media outlets to drive Wellcome’s advocacy goals. This includes Wellcome’s COVID-Zero campaign, which asks businesses to:

- **Donate** towards the $8bn urgently needed for R&D.
- **Advocate** to governments in the markets where they’re based.
- **Educate** employees, customers and suppliers about COVID-Zero.

We have also provided a clear, evidence-based voice in a crowded media environment, helping to **rebut misinformation**.
Impact of COVID-19 on the AMR agenda

Attention for the foreseeable future will be focussed on resolving the COVID-19 crisis. COVID-19 is likely to change the perception of the AMR agenda forever.

**On the bad side:**
The relevance of AMR may seem less important and therefore a *lower priority for the long term.* Fatigue of dealing with a health crisis may cause aversion to engage with solving long-term global issues. Moving out of crisis may lead to “de-mob happy” detachment. Rebuilding economies, and possibly rebuilding political stability, are likely to become all-consuming and leave no space for health matters.

➢ *Bottom line challenge:* *No time for political engagement with AMR.*

**On the good side:**
The need for better international cooperation is better understood and valued. Surveillance and data-sharing will become prioritised. A better alignment will emerge between health system strengthening, preparedness/response measures and AMR agenda.

➢ *Bottom line opportunity:* *Political willingness to solve global health issues and invest in capabilities and capacity to achieve global implementation of National Action Plans.*
Wellcome will continue to support the AMR agenda

COVID-19 is likely to lead to an increase of AMR.
- Increased Abx usage
- Healthcare avoidance increasing infection prevalence in communities
- Maybe increased IPC mitigates nosocomial transmission?

We see AMR is a major global health threat to be addressed over decades and we are positioning AMR in the context of thinking following COVID-19.

More needs to be done to involve the Global South in the leadership and ownership of the global AMR agenda.
Wellcome is developing plans for the next Call to Action.
Thank you