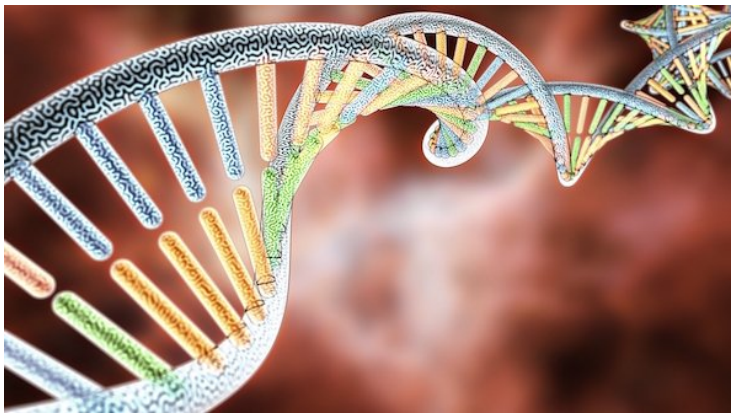
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ASIA EDITION

Novartis, GSK explore African genetic diversity for malaria, TB treatment

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The Project AfricaÃ?Â GenomicÃ?Â ResearchÃ?Â Approach forÃ?Â Diversity and OptimisingÃ?Â Therapeutics (GRADIENT) has a combined funding commitment of $3.6 million over five years



Novartis and GSK has announced the launch of a collaboration to support high-quality scientific research investigating the link between genetic diversity across different regions in Africa and its potential impact on response to drug therapeutics.

The Project Africa Genomic Research Approach for Diversity and Optimising Therapeutics (GRADIENT), with a combined funding commitment of $3.6 million over five years, calls on African researchers to submit robust research proposals on the relevance of African genetic diversity to the treatment of malaria and tuberculosis (TB).

Lutz Hegemann, Chief Operating Officer, Global Health, Novartis said: “It has the potential to improve the efficacy and tolerability of current and future medicines, starting with two of the most deadly diseases, malaria and tuberculosis.”

Pauline Williams, Senior Vice President, Global Health Pharma, GSK said: “We are excited to launch Project Africa GRADIENT which aims to catalyse the best science in the continent to optimise treatment responses for malaria and tuberculosis, two infectious diseases that disproportionately affect African populations.”

Project Africa GRADIENT comprises three funding mechanisms to support:

1. Fellowships: A limited number of fellowships in academic institutions with a reputation for global excellence to collect and analyse data on determinants of drug response.
2. Investigator-sponsored research: Hypothesis-driven research focused on understanding genetic regional variation in drug response.
3. Seed-Fund: A limited number of projects to enable the exploration of new research goals, depending on the results from 1 and 2.

Within the scope of the agreement, the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) will administer the project, and a Joint Steering Committee will oversee the review of submitted proposals. Priority will be given to research aimed at collecting data from currently under-represented regions and improving the scientific robustness of inconsistent data.

Prof Glenda Gray, President and CEO, SAMRC said, “It is exciting to see more and more global partners taking interest in the challenges of Africa. We are delighted that partners are now seeking to address the challenges of Africa by their quest to understand the fundamental differences between genetics of Africa and the rest of the world.”

As a first step, researchers based at universities, science councils and other public research organisations across Africa are invited to express their ‘intent to submit’ through the SAMRC website. Final award recipients are expected to be announced by end of 2021.