

Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) health: a new programme to facilitate LMIC research capacity



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Abstract

Background The Partnership for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) Health programme, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is a new research partnership programme that directly supports researchers from developing countries as Principal Investigators in partnership with collaborators at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). The goals of this programme are threefold: (1) to advance critical evidence to address crucial health challenges facing LMICs; (2) to support collaboration and build on existing relationships between local public health and research institutions, global health practitioners, host country government, NIH researchers, and USAID Missions and Embassy staff; and (3) to build capacity by supporting researchers in LMICs thereby enabling local solutions to context specific challenges.

Methods More than 180 preproposals from 25 LMICs were submitted to the first PEER Health research solicitation focused on Child Survival. After consultation with USAID Missions to ensure relevance to host country health priorities, about 80 applicants were invited to submit a full proposal. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development organised a special emphasis panel for the scientific review of PEER Health full proposals to address both scientific merit and research capacity building aspects of the grant proposals, whilst maintaining key elements of the standard NIH peer review model. 40 experienced NIH reviewers, representing a wide variety of scientific disciplines and global public health experience, did the peer review of grants using a novel IT system developed for the PEER Health initiative. The National Academies of Sciences hosted an interagency protocol review to ensure scientific validity and compliance with international human subject guidelines.

Findings Sixteen diverse grant partnerships were awarded in ten USAID Child Survival priority countries in Africa and Asia. Research funded under this programme is varied and includes studies from diverse topical areas, including malaria, neonatal sepsis, breast-feeding, tuberculosis, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, among others. Studies include investigation of both facility and community level interventions. NIH partners are largely US based and half are support by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID).

Interpretation Broad interest in this novel programme and applications from 25 countries show a crucial need for more directed funding for research strengthening and partnerships with LMIC Principal Investigators.

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Contributors

CRW, CB, AW, JEH, VK, and ESH drafted the Abstract. All authors are members of the PEER Health Steering Committee and have contributed substantially to the strategic vision and operational management of the PEER Health programme. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the Abstract for publication.

Declaration of interests

AW, CB, CRW, and KH are programme managers of PEER Health at USAID. ES and RG implement the PEER Health programme at the National Academies of Science.

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