



Letter to the editor

Current situation of scientific research in health in El Salvador

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Dear Editor:

Regarding the article on research in health sciences, published in *Alerta*, volume 1, number 1,ⁱ it mentions that health research should play a crucial role in identifying and solving health problems that affect the communities of our country. Therefore, it is important to know the current panorama of health research in El Salvador, and its evolution through time, in order to promote new regulations and projects that allow fostering the research culture for the benefit of the Salvadoran society.

It is important to reflect on the fact that strengthening the infrastructure and promotion of health research in El Salvador would allow: obtaining data, information, and scientific evidence for decision making, improving public health policies, creating new health strategies, developing more accurate disease prevention actions, and finally, improving the health of the population in general.

Although there is no consolidated research culture in El Salvador, it is possible to advance through the regulation, strengthening, and effective application of policies that promote it.ⁱⁱ Legislation is still being developed; however, it is important to approach the existing regulatory framework. Therefore, some ideas are developed below.

In the Constitution of the Republic of El Salvador, the importance of scientific development is generally recognized through Article 53, which states: "The right to education and culture is inherent to the human person. The State will promote research and scientific work", so it has always been necessary to create more laws to promote and regulate scientific activity. As a result of what was described above, in 2016 the Law for Scientific and Technological Development in El Salvador was published, which is the product of many consultations and workshops with the different universities and institutions linked to research, science and technology in the country, as part of the actions embodied in the National Policy for Science, Technology and Innovation, which was aimed at solving the problems of professional training in research.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another important regulation is the Law of Higher Education of El Salvador, which, in its article three, establishes that higher education integrates three functions: "Teaching, scientific research and social projection"; furthermore, this same law authorizes universities to choose the best way to execute these functions, as specified in article 25, paragraph three, which states that "State and private universities are empowered to: a) Determine how they will fulfill their teaching, research, and social projection functions, and the pro-

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portion of their study plans and programs, their Statutes, and Regulations"; Article 23 of the Regulations of the Higher Education Law states that "for the development of research, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) must have an organizational structure, policies and necessary regulations, personnel in charge of administering and executing projects, budget, infrastructure and other necessary resources"; however, in practice there are still significant structural, economic and professional limitations that make it difficult to promote research in El Salvador.

An important point to take into account in this journey towards scientific development is the Organic Law of the University of El Salvador, which establishes in article three, that one of the purposes of the university is: "To carry out philosophical, scientific, artistic and technological research of universal character, mainly on the Salvadoran and Central American reality". Moreover, in El Salvador, with the creation of the Secretariat of Scientific Research of the University of El Salvador and the restructuring of the Scientific Research Council, CIC-UES, at the beginning of 2015, it was sought to modernize the Research Policy that would govern scientific research at the University of El Salvador, for the five years 2016 - 2020; however, these efforts had a limited impact in the field of health research, mainly due to a lack of resources and poor linkage with the needs of the national health system.

In recent years, important steps have been taken. The members of Parliament of the Health, Agriculture, and Environment Commission issued a favorable opinion for the creation of the Law on Clinical Trials with Products Regulated by the Superintendence of Health Regulation, which seeks to regulate clinical trials carried out with drugs, nutritional supplements, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and equipment, as well as new health technologies. Also, in February 2025, a draft bill for a Health Research Law was presented to the legislative assembly, aimed at promoting, developing, and regulating scientific research projects in this field.

Moreover, the National Institute of Health is promoting two normative documents that are in the process of being made official by the Ministry of Health this year: the Manual of Health Processes and Procedures and the Technical Guidelines for Health Research, which will contribute to the legal strengthening of research. However, it is essential to ensure that all these initiatives have clear mechanisms for financing, monitoring and effective application.

Although progress in legislation is recognized, there are still structural, economic

and linkage limitations with the needs of the health system. It is indisputable that there is much to be done in strengthening the training of researchers, in consolidating the infrastructure for research, in guaranteeing its financial sustainability, and in orienting research towards the country's health priorities, but this is the challenge that in the medium term will allow the creation of public health policy bases, contributing to improving the care of the population and allowing the country to position itself at the international level in this field.

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