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Australia lagging behind similar countries in funding biotech research: Study

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Need to increase total R&D investment to globally competitive levels



A study co-led by The University of Queensland (UQ) has found Australia is lagging behind similar countries in funding basic research, particularly in the medical, biotechnology and pharmaceutical sectors.

Dr Lisette Pregelj from UQ's School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences analysed funding and innovation data globally and found Australia's ability to develop innovative basic research was decreasing.

"Our ranking on the Global Innovation Index (GII) has been steadily waning over the past five years – 25th place in 2022, down from 23rd in 2020, 22nd in 2019 and 20th in 2018," Dr Pregelj said.

The researchers found a lack of funding, particularly for basic research, may be contributing to the decline in innovation ranking.

In 1996 almost 60 per cent of Australia's higher education investment in research and development was in executing basic research, but by 2019 that figure had dropped to 40 per cent.

This has not been the case for the US or China, which have each increased their proportions of higher education R&D investment in basic research.

Study co-lead Dr Rosemary Harrison, a UQ alum and now biotechnology executive at TCR2 Therapeutics, said Australia needed to re-focus. "We welcome the announcement of the $15 billion National Reconstruction Fund but the balance of funding between basic and applied research will be critical", said Dr Rosemary.