

SRG Annual Report on Innovative Health Initiative (IHI) 2022

European Partnerships are initiatives where the EU together with private and/or public partners commit to jointly support the development and implementation of a programme of research and innovation activities. These partnerships continue to be a feature in Horizon Europe with the Innovative Health Initiative (IHI) been the largest partnership in the area of health with a total budget of €2.4 billion and is funded jointly by the EU public funding and by industry associations representing Europe's life science industries. IHI brings together a wider range of industry partners with a focus on healthcare, medical imaging, radiotherapy, health ICT, pharmaceutical, vaccine, biotechnology and medical technology development. With this multi-sector partnership focused on health innovation IHI is well placed to forge successful, cross-sectoral, collaborative projects, break the silos between different industries and support the EU with a greater push towards digitalization, healthcare transformation and the green agenda.

SRG feedback on the first calls (Call 1 and call 2):

The first calls (Call 1 and call 2) of the Innovative Health Initiative (IHI) were launched in June 2022. Like all new programs there are new players, new rules and a learning curve for all stakeholders. However, certain elements of the program have proven to be more challenging for some stakeholders. In IHI, At least 45% of each project's budget has to come from industry partner / contributing partner contributions. With large scale projects in the region of €20-30 million this 45% requirement has proven to be particularly challenging for the research committee given the short duration of the window for submitting a proposal, from the official call launch.

Identifying interested industry participants who are willing to make this 45% contribution to a project in single stage calls has been very challenging. The SRG considered that this might explain a reduced participation level for all topics in the first call. The SRG also noticed that applicants who submitted proposal to IHI are primarily from the larger countries in Europe where large industry resides.

The second most challenging aspect of IHI is understanding the new financial rules where industry (and contributing partners) may also contribute with additional activities (IKAA), in addition to the operational activities (IKOP) or direct financial contributions. Navigating and understanding these rules is a very onerous task for public bodies, SMEs and new entrants.

The States' Representatives Group has engaged with IHI team and provided feedback to the Governing Board on these challenges and obstacles to participation to ensure this is a pan European program that is accessible to all stakeholders and the research committee. While the topics and research areas are sufficiently broad and aligned with the interest of most member states, the SRG expressed concerns that IHI might not be a level playing field for participants across Europe. In addition to this more needs to be done by the industry associations COCIR, EFPIA (including Vaccines Europe), EuropaBio and MedTech Europe in terms of encouraging industry members who reside in Member States across Europe to participate. This in turn will create a more competitive landscape and ensure the scientific excellence in proposals and projects.

SRG consultation on draft topic texts and collaboration in the IHI Governance with the Science & Innovation Panel:

One of the main tasks of the SRG is the consultation on the draft work programmes, including draft calls for proposals as well as providing links to Horizon Europe and other EU, national and regional initiatives. The SRG regrets being consulted at a very late stage when the draft topic texts have already been pre-published on the IHI website. In order to provide a substantial opinion on the draft topic texts and in particular to provide information on relevant national initiatives where IHI projects could synergize with, it is important to include the SRG early on in the topic generation process. With regard to the collaboration of the SRG with

the Science & Innovation Panel (SIP) in the IHI Governance there is also a need for further reflection and improvement. Despite the SRG Chair & Vice Chair being permanent members of the panel, and despite the changes introduced recently by the IHI Office which is now sharing with the SRG abstracts of topic texts, the SRG considers that the information flow from the SIP to the SRG is disrupted by the strict confidentiality rules that apply. The SRG therefore believes that the level of information shared with the States' Representatives on the draft topic texts as well as ideas for potential future topics assessed by the SIP is still not sufficient. The Innovative Health Initiative (IHI) has the potential to be a game changer in delivering tangible benefits for patients, society and ensure that Europe remains at the cutting edge of interdisciplinary, sustainable, patient-centric health research however, to optimise success and participation across Member States and associated countries, the partnership will require adjustment and greater promotion.

Martha Cahill, Chairperson & Jan Skriwanek, Vice Chair
On behalf of the SRG