

Stroke research funding versus burden of disease (World Stroke Organisation funded STARBUD Project)

Background/aims: Spending on research can shape new discoveries and care but is rarely allocated based on agreed priorities and needs. We aimed to compare recent estimates of the funding allocated to stroke, heart disease and cancer, and to examine research spending relative to burden of disease.

Methods: International collaborators from each region of the world were approached to identify research funding data in their country for stroke, heart disease and cancer in the 2018-2019 (pre-pandemic) period. We obtained the number of grants and total funding in each disease category. The overall results were divided into fellowship or project funding allocated. Disease burden data was extracted from GBD-2019.

Results: Funding information was received from >100 agencies, representing 25 countries. Limited data were available from low-income countries. Total funding was 13.47 (59%) billion USD for cancer, 7.08 (31%) for heart disease, and 2.29 (10%) for stroke. Project funding was 64%, 27%, and 9% for heart disease, cancer and stroke, respectively. Of 63,428 projects funded, only 6,261 were for stroke. USA received the highest amount of funding, and the largest number of projects. Limited information available from six countries showed stroke received 10.6% of the total USD 251 million fellowship funding, and 118 (8.9%) fellowships. GBD 2019 data showed that stroke represented 22% of the burden of the three diseases combined.

Conclusion: Our findings show that stroke research remains considerably underfunded despite its high burden. The study provides updated evidence for policy-makers to better fund stroke research to ultimately reduce stroke burden.