



Weekly Wire
News from East Asia and Pacific
National Science Foundation
Tokyo Regional Office
June 17, 2014

New “NIH-like” Agency to be Created: Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development (A-MED)

Japan will create a new funding agency in April 2015 called Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development (A-MED), which specifies funding in health and medical fields. A-MED will consolidate the health and medical budgets that are currently administered individually by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW), and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), and become the control tower for making decisions on Japan’s policy for health and medical research.

In Japan, funding for health and medical research has historically been administered by three ministries, i.e., “basic” research by MEXT; “developmental” research by MHLW; and “commercialization” of research by METI. This separation of administration according to research stage has resulted inefficiency and the non-seamless flow of research. It has also caused considerable delay in creating new medicines. A-MED was established to improve the administration of funding for the various research stages.

Whereas A-MED includes a collection of the health and medical research program funds of the three ministries above, 37.3% of Grants-in-Aid (KAKENHI) or Yen 37.3 billion (\$373 million), which is invested in curiosity-driven basic research in medical, dental, and pharmaceutical fields will not be consolidated into A-MED. When the establishment of A-MED was announced, there was a criticism that A-MED may lead Japan to weigh too heavily on commercialization of health and medical research at the risk of neglecting basic research. To protect the importance of basic research, it was agreed upon that KAKENHI that is administered by MEXT to promote basic research not be included under A-MED.

A-MED already exists virtually with a JFY2014 budget of Yen 213 billion (\$2.13 billion). It will physically exist in JFY2015, although its location has not been determined yet. The budget request for A-MED for JFY2015 and beyond will continue to come from the three ministries of MEXT, MHLW, and METI, as any funding agencies in Japan cannot independently request budgets without going through the supervising ministries and agencies. The A-MED Secretariat expects its JFY2015 budget to remain about the same as the one for JFY2014.