

An Introduction to the Health Ministry's Screening Committee and the Document

The Health Ministry's Screening Committee (HMSC) is a high level committee, which was constituted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of India and has been working since 1980s. The Committee takes decision on the international research proposals in the field of health research requiring foreign collaboration and/or assistance from foreign funding agencies. Prior to submission to HMSC, the research proposals are evaluated on the basis of scientific significance, justification for foreign collaboration and national health priorities, national security/sensitivity angle etc. The HMSC includes representatives from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare including Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), Department of Health and Family Welfare, Department of AYUSH; Ministry of External Affairs; Ministry of Finance; Department of Biotechnology; Department of Science and Technology; Directorate General of Armed Forces Medical Services. The HMSC is chaired by the Secretary, Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India. The HMSC meets regularly at an interval of every three months (in March, June, September and December in each calendar year). In certain cases, where there is a specified and written deadline of an international funding agency, decision on the proposal is expedited through Chairman, HMSC on its scientific merit.

Terms of Reference of the HMSC:

- *To carry out screening of all proposals involving foreign collaboration on a bilateral basis.*
- *To periodically monitor the progress of bilateral agreements between India and other countries and to make suitable recommendations regarding their implementation.*
- *To consider all proposals in which extension of ongoing research projects is sought with or without external financial support.*
- *To give final approval for transfer of biological material.*

The Indian investigators are required to submit their research projects involving foreign assistance and/or collaboration in health research to ICMR at IHD for approval of Government of India through HMSC. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) acts as the technical arm for this Committee and is responsible for technical review of the collaborative proposals. The International Health Division (IHD) at ICMR is the Secretariat for HMSC and facilitates placement of collaborative research projects before this Committee as a mandatory requirement. The centenary meeting of HMSC was organized on December 10, 2012. The status of international collaborative research projects which are under consideration at ICMR has been made available on ICMR website under "Search Research Projects" with effect from August 1, 2012 for the information of researchers.

In June 2008, the International Health Division published a document entitled “An overview of international collaboration in biomedical research”, as suggested by the HMSC. This document provided a digest on the international collaborative research projects approved by HMSC during the years 2000 to 2007. Through this document, an effort was also made to provide an evidence base which could assist policy makers in decision making in the area of health research.

The International Health Division has now prepared the present document as a sequel to the earlier one with a focus on the projects approved by HMSC during January, 2008 to December, 2012. The information pertaining to the collaborative research projects during this period is as per the protocols approved by HMSC and minuted accordingly. The document could enable policy makers for development of policies related to health research and prioritize key areas of scientific enquiry and research. The document also provides a brief account on ICMR’s existing partnerships with other countries/agencies around the globe.