

Supporting Innovative Global Health Technologies (SIGHT) Act

BACKGROUND

The Supporting Innovative Global Health Technologies (SIGHT) Act will help save more lives globally by supercharging health innovation activities at the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The bill would establish a disease-agnostic program at USAID to advance the research and development (R&D) of vaccines, drugs, and other technologies—enabling the agency to be nimbler and more innovative in accelerating research in unmet and emerging health areas.

THE NEED

Despite tremendous gains in global health, today we are still without essential tools to combat many long-standing health challenges, and new threats are continuing to emerge. USAID, as part of its broader mission to advance global health, has a decades-long track record of advancing fit-for-purposes tools for places where infrastructure is limited, electricity is unreliable, and trained health workers are scarce. Yet despite the agency's R&D successes, it faces structural impediments. Currently health R&D investments at USAID are drawn from and determined by disease-specific programs, which limits the agency's ability to pursue promising scientific opportunities that fall outside or across health areas or to respond quickly to emerging epidemic threats. Additionally, with USAID's commitment to inclusive development—which seeks to engage all people more deeply in transforming their societies—there is opportunity for the agency to evolve its approaches to engage impacted communities more intentionally in setting and carrying out its health research agenda.

THE SOLUTION

The SIGHT Act would enable USAID to drive more inclusive innovation and be nimbler in addressing present and future health challenges by:

- 1. Establishing global health research and development as a distinct program area and budget line within the Global Health Bureau (GHB) at USAID.**
 - a. This will empower USAID to pursue R&D projects that fall outside or cut across disease verticals, such as platform technologies or multipurpose-prevention tools, or address emerging threats. It would supplement, rather than supplant, existing agency mechanisms for supporting R&D.
 - b. While the bill does not authorize new funding, it creates structural changes that will allow USAID to operationalize additional R&D investments in unmet areas once funding is available.
- 2. Establishing a Chief Innovation Officer for Health (CIOH) within USAID's GHB to advise the Assistant Administrator for Global Health on R&D priorities and investments.**
 - a. This will bring greater leadership, oversight, and scientific expertise to R&D activities; help generate best practices and shared learnings across the agency's now siloed R&D efforts; and establish a focal point for external stakeholders to catalyze multisector partnerships.
- 3. Establishing a Global Health Research and Development Advisory Council comprised of external health R&D experts to advise the CIOH and the Assistant Administrator.**
 - a. This governance structure offers a vehicle to engage representatives from affected communities, other US agencies, and scientific experts more meaningfully in shaping USAID's health research agenda—advancing more inclusive innovation and improved interagency coordination.
- 4. Authorizing the USAID Administrator and the CIO to make Health Innovation Research and Development Awards.**
- 5. Requiring an annual report to Congress on USAID's global health R&D investments and results.**
 - a. This will promote greater accountability and transparency. Given funding for health R&D is drawn from several different budget lines, it remains challenging for Congress and the public to understand the totality of the agency's investments and impact.