

ARVO International Advocacy Toolkit: Switzerland

Introduction

This report is solely focused on the field of vision research and includes basic/fundamental and clinical research. Therefore, it is not intended to be representative of the current funding situation for other fields of science in Switzerland.

Note that filing for patents for later licensing or acquisition is not a means that is fully supported by academic institutions and even much less exploited in Switzerland. Although there has been progress since 2006 regarding supporting this aspect of innovation, especially at the technical universities, Switzerland has a long way to go with respects to maximizing opportunities using its academically owned patent portfolio.

1. Which organization(s) are significant sources of research funding? (e.g., national/local governments; private funding/foundations/charity groups; large non-governmental organizations (NGOs); industry/pharmaceutical companies)

National/Local Governments

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) is the primary academic research funding source. The SNSF funds research in Switzerland on behalf of the Swiss government. They provide an annual report on how these funds are distributed:
<http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/profile/profile/Pages/default.aspx>

Private funding/Foundations/Charity groups

- Gelbert Rüt Foundation (translational research) <https://www.grstiftung.ch/en/funding/funding-strategy.html>
- Velux Foundation (health and light) <https://veluxstiftung.ch/funding-areas/ophthalmology-research/>
- Fondation Louis-Jeantet (Geneve-specific) <https://www.jeantet.ch/la-fondation/buts-et-valeurs-de-la-fondation/>
- Grateful patients / Planned Giving:
 - Example: In 2001, Werner Spross bequeath CHF10 million after his passing to a community hospital (Triemlispital).

There are other examples of significant contributions, but information cannot be easily (and publicly) accessible. However, grateful patient giving, and planned giving are not yet an established means to support research efforts.

Industry/pharmaceutical companies

- Joint-venture (with academic institutions)

- Example: Institute of Molecular and Clinical Ophthalmology Basel – a joint venture between the University of Basel, the University Hospital Basel and Novartis <https://www.unibas.ch/en/News-Events/News/Uni-Info/New-Institute-for-Eye-Research-in-Basel-unites-Fundamental-and-Clinical-Research.html?null>
- Directed research projects: varied and specific to sub-specialty
- Clinical Research: mostly industrial-initiated
 - Switzerland is an expensive country to conduct trials when compared to other European countries.
 - Advantage: quality and reliability of the data
 - Disadvantage: small population size / difficult to quickly recruit patients and expensive infrastructure and personnel.
 - If study is investigator-initiated, industry usually supports through in-kind donations (use of device or medication).

2. What does the normal science funding/policy decision-making process look like?

The question can only be answered if limited to one funding source. Using the Swiss National Science Foundation as the “normal science funding” of the Swiss academic researchers, the SNSF has created a video on YouTube to describe the evaluation procedure of the SNSF: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtqhryuVb5g>

3. Which patient advocacy groups, if any, are active in the area?

Retina Suisse and Retina International both located in Zurich, Switzerland, are probably the most prominent patient advocacy groups in Switzerland related to ophthalmology.

<https://retina.ch/>

<http://www.retina-international.org/what-we-do/advocacy>

The Light for Sight Foundation is a new organization (founded in 2015 in Zurich) with a long-term goal of supporting research and promoting advocacy for annual eye screening for all children and adolescents to prevent severe visual impairment caused by keratoconus.

www.lightforsight.org

Retinal International serves as an inspiration to the founders of the Light for Sight Foundation. The Light for Sight Foundation’s first aim is to provide unconditional access to treatment to all children and adolescents until the only known treatment to arrest the disease is covered by health insurance in all countries.

[Do they partner with researchers to promote research funding/policy?](#)

Retinal International is considered the umbrella organization of 33 non-profit organizations that fund and support research on rare and genetically inherited retinal dystrophies.

In addition to the 33 organizations, Retinal International teams up with the scientific and medical communities to help achieve their mission.

The Light for Sight Foundation brings together not only researchers but also clinicians and industry as they are focused on providing access to treatment but also finding a cure. All partners are equally important.

4. Are there existing national/regional organizations that work towards improving research funding/policy (advocating for increased research funding/better policies)?

Fortunately, Switzerland has a financially comfortable research environment for academic researchers within university settings so the concept of diversifying funding to ensure research continuity is not yet needed or well-established.

Advocacy efforts that occur in the US, for example, do not exist in Switzerland. Rather, lobbying and advocacy is deemed necessary for other political matters such as protecting the healthcare reimbursement rates for clinicians.

5. How do scientists currently contribute to the existing funding/policymaking/advocacy process, if at all?

As already demonstrated by Retinal International/Retina Suisse, there has to be an educational exchange between different invested partners (e.g., patients, clinicians, clinical scientists, basic/fundamental researchers and industry) to make an impact. Therefore, organizations like Retina International bring these parties together to advocate for better options for these patients in the future (either through quality-of-life aspects or through improved treatment possibilities).

6. When are science funding/policy decisions made?

The Swiss National Science Foundation has a multi-lingual website that is able to provide in depth information about the evaluation procedure and project funding:

<http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/projects/projects-in-all-disciplines/Pages/default.aspx#Evaluation%20procedure>

7. What kinds of opportunities exist for scientists to interact with funders and policymakers?

Can scientists invite decision makers to their lab/institution to see their work firsthand?

Yes, but traditionally, this step does not happen until after funding is received.

Do the funding/policy organizations hold open meetings or solicit comments from the public that researchers can participate in?

This is not a regular practice in Switzerland.

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