

## Oral research in the world today

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**T**he IADR mission highlights the importance of advancing research and broadening knowledge to improve oral health worldwide, by opening avenues of communication and oral health support programs, especially in less developed regions, and by strengthening partnerships with other social stakeholders, whether institutional or community-based. Different organizations have designed strategic plans to achieve these goals.

With this in mind, it is important to outline the theoretical and methodological framework that will facilitate this process and strengthen the results. This framework should involve:

### **Promoting interdisciplinary studies**

Health and the oral component of health have an interdisciplinary status because they are the result of the interaction among genes, the social model, life style, and perceptions, which reflect how the health-disease-care process is analyzed by individuals and by society. The promotion of interdisciplinary studies requires that the International Association for Dental Research (IADR) encourage networking among research centers and teams, so as to include experts who have majored in biological and social sciences, including economics. The complexity of today's challenges requires harnessing the skills and energies of many disciplines to develop innovative and effective solutions.

### **Encouraging investigations on the process of social construction of knowledge, favoring the development of networks supported by agreements among universities, research centers, government agencies, private enterprises and non-governmental organizations, and guaranteeing an ethical framework**

The translation of knowledge into clinical, teaching, sanitary and management activities accounts for the impact of research. Research in the health field is anchored not only to the paradigm concerning objective health needs, but also to subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, which are intervening variables in health care. The conceptions formed by the participating researchers thus become part of the investigation, where methodology is consequential to the theoretical focus, based on which the research object is constructed. Hypotheses should be tested empirically, and should also inquire into the interactions between the investigators and the players at a given historical moment. Designing the agenda for the development of multicenter research projects involves not only getting ready to operate through constructs such as indices, scales or empirical typologies, but also discussing the nature of both individual and

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collective behaviors, examining reality through interviews or textual documents, analyzing particular situations, and detailing distinctive characteristics and differences at a given historical moment.

### **Promoting research on global health**

Defining research projects in the health field involves addressing socially constructed problems to be solved by several converging disciplinary fields, and by using the appropriate methodologies. This definition should later be translated into political and health-related decisions. The IADR must define policies with the aim of reinforcing relationships among institutions, in order to develop projects with a regional/global/local interest. The IADR has given a timely response, by creating the Global Oral Health Inequalities Research Network Scientific Group, in its multiple dimensions, and establishing it as a privileged object of study.

### **Developing and incorporating social impact indicators in research**

Universities and research centers are concerned about demonstrating that their social and civic role is as important as research and teaching. This perspective requires that the IADR reconsider the

evaluation or self-evaluation indicators of the research systems, taking social impact into account, according to the particular characteristics of different regions. The indicators used to assess research projects and systems have become priority objects of study per se, and must be redirected to strengthen research at both the regional and local levels. The Council of Health Research for Development (COHRED) approved a critical review on evaluation indicators in research systems, pointing out the importance of finding strategic indicators aside from those that regard the process, structures and results, and introducing those that will allow assessing the social impact of the research work. The strategic indicators measure activities that are external to research itself, but that act as an intervening variable. The Council concluded that the analysis of the nature of the research in the health field requires new methods for data collection and management, including qualitative techniques.

Efforts that contribute to decreasing the specific and general health risks are necessary, but not sufficient. In addition, it is essential to promote equity and inclusion in a healthier world. The IADR can and must play a central role defining the oral component of this inspiring project.

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