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## Germany's genome boost

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The German [government's](#) recent pledge to allocate another €135 million to the country's [National Genome Research Network](#) (NGFN) has received a qualified welcome from researchers.

The NGFN was set up in 2001 to help identify the genetic causes of diseases and to develop a new generation of therapeutics. Federal Minister for Education and Research Edelgard Bulmahn, who announced the fresh funds in Berlin last week, had strong praise for the network, saying that it had managed to produce a "wealth of research results in a very short time."

She said that that the NGFN had succeeded in translating academic research into commercially viable enterprises.

Christian Kubisch, leader of a group of researchers working on neurogenetics at the University of Bonn's [Institute for Human Genetics](#), welcomed the government's commitment to fund the network - which has so far received €180 million from the government - for an additional 3 years.

"The funding that we have got so far has certainly done our group a lot of good," he told us. "We haven't yet reached the point where we can patent any of our discoveries, but we think that we should be able to apply for patents in 3 to 5 years' time."

He noted that the sum of €135 million meant a reduction in real terms and that he would have welcomed even more cash.

However, not all researchers agree that the money channeled into the NGFN has been well spent so far. Anna Wobus from the Institute for Plant Genetics in Gatersleben, who is the coordinator of the [German Research Foundation's](#) stem cell program, said that the network had failed to reach its objective of supporting those groups that were seeking to apply discoveries in the field of genomics to the treatment of diseases.

"The funds that were supposed to support the medical application of genome research have gone, to a huge extent, to groups that are concentrating on the molecular biological techniques of genome research. In my view, there has been a very limited transfer of data to cell biologists and clinicians, who are seeking ways to treat diseases," she told us. Calling the NGFN results "thin," Wobus said that closer collaboration between scientists and clinicians was needed if the network was to be able to tap the huge potential for treating and curing diseases.

Her view was not shared by Kubisch. He said that the new NGFN funding program had shifted the emphasis even further to funding the medical application of genetic information.

The NGFN consists of five networks, which focus on cancer, cardiovascular disease, diseases of the nervous system, diseases due to environmental factors, and diseases due to infection and inflammation. The five core centers of competence, which have so far received the lion's share of the funding, are the German Cancer Research center in Heidelberg, the Society of Biotechnological Research in Braunschweig, the Research Centre for Environment and Health in Munich, the Max Delbrück Centre in Berlin, and the [Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics](#) in Berlin.

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