

The vital role of Artificial Intelligence in a time of COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak has delivered an unprecedented shock to the world. In response, the global research community has mobilised itself to try and overcome the challenges posed by this crisis to our public health systems, our economy and our society.

Artificial Intelligence is viewed as one of the tools with the potential to help; in diagnosing patients, in supporting an effective treatment approach to predicting outcomes, in drug discovery and drug development and in modelling the spread to informing exit strategies.

To ensure Artificial Intelligence is able to make a reliable and valuable contribution to the global fight against this pandemic, we need to create the right conditions. This means:

- **Availability of high-quality data:** Drawing meaningful conclusions relies on meaningful data. The lack of curated data sets is undermining the most valuable resources we currently have; time and trust. Access to high quality data needs to be fair, transparent and non-discriminatory.¹
- **Clear and consistent rules on the use of health data:** Legal uncertainty and inconsistency in data protection implementation have hindered the large-scale sharing of health data within the research community. Much more will be achieved when organisations are confident on how to share data and when patients and citizens are better informed how health data is used and the safeguards that apply.
- **International cooperation:** Cooperation is essential, as only the collective efforts and knowledge of the global research community will lead us out of this crisis. We cannot afford protectionist reflexes such as data localisation, which would further hamper the information and data sharing across borders.

In view of the conditions set out above, **COCIR would like to call upon:**

- **The European Commission**, to accelerate creation of a European Health Data Space,² taking the current pandemic crisis as a first use case to build a federated model that can be quickly and easily scaled. In addition, Horizon Europe should promote genuine collaborative R&D for healthcare, for example under the envisioned Innovative Health Initiative³;
- **The eHealth Network**, to play its coordinating role in driving common specifications among Member States on quality and interoperability of data to its fullest extent. This should be further incentivised through tendering and procurement processes;
- **The European Data Protection Board**, to embed the current guidelines for scientific research into a consistent, long-term strategy on scientific research and the use of health data; and
- **The European Institutions**, to support positioning Europe as a global player while maintaining an open view of the world; one that fosters international cooperation and an open approach to international data flows.⁴

¹ COCIR publication "[Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare](#)"; Section 2. Access to Data (April 2019)

² COCIR publication "[European Health Data Space – Towards a better patient outcome](#)" (November 2019)

³ <https://www.euhealthppp.org>

⁴ As outlined in the Commission's communication "[A European strategy for data](#)" (February 2020)