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Empowering Scientific Discoveries in Health and Life Sciences

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Abstract

Background: The health and life sciences are undergoing a transformative era in which foundational discoveries are being translated into clinical applications at unprecedented speed. This acceleration is driven by technological convergence, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the empowerment of researchers through advanced tools and global networks.

Recent Advances: Significant progress has been made across multiple fronts. Next-generation sequencing technologies have enabled population-scale genomic studies, revealing the genetic architecture of disease and informing precision medicine approaches. Multi-omics integration and systems biology provide comprehensive molecular portraits that capture the complexity of biological systems. CRISPR-based genome editing has transformed functional genomics and opened new therapeutic avenues for genetic disorders. Artificial intelligence and machine learning are accelerating drug discovery, improving diagnostic accuracy, and enabling predictive modelling of biological processes. High-throughput screening and bioinformatics platforms have democratized access to advanced research capabilities.

Key Challenges: Despite these advances, sustained empowerment of scientific discovery faces substantial obstacles. Fragmentation between basic and clinical research limits translation. Reproducibility concerns undermine confidence in research findings. Infrastructure and funding disparities perpetuate inequities in research capacity between high-income and low- and middle-income countries. Interoperability challenges impede integration of health data across systems. Emerging infectious diseases continue to test global preparedness and response capabilities.

Future Directions: The next decade will witness deeper convergence of biology with engineering, computational science, and data science. Personalized and predictive healthcare systems will integrate multi-omic profiling with environmental and behavioural data. Sustainable biotechnology will address environmental challenges while creating economic value. Strengthening global scientific resilience through collaborative networks, open science, and capacity building will be essential for empowering discoveries that improve health worldwide.

Keywords: Scientific Discovery; Health Sciences; Life Sciences; Genomics; Artificial Intelligence; Precision Medicine; Translational Research

1. Introduction

The health and life sciences encompass the systematic study of living organisms and the application of this knowledge to improve human health. This vast domain spans molecular mechanisms, cellular processes, organismal physiology, population health, and environmental interactions. The scope of modern research extends from deciphering the genetic code to engineering synthetic biological systems, from understanding cellular heterogeneity to predicting disease dynamics at population scale ^[1].

The historical evolution of scientific discovery in biomedicine reveals a trajectory of accelerating progress driven by technological innovation. The discovery of the DNA double helix in 1953 inaugurated the molecular biology era, while the

completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003 marked the transition to genomics-enabled biology. The development of CRISPR-Cas9 for genome editing in 2012, the application of artificial intelligence to protein structure prediction in 2020, and the rapid development of mRNA vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic exemplify the accelerating pace of discovery and translation [2]. Each technological advance has not only expanded what is possible but has also revealed new questions and frontiers.

The role of interdisciplinary research in accelerating innovation has become increasingly apparent. The most transformative advances emerge at the intersections of traditional disciplines: biology with engineering enabling synthetic biology; computation with medicine powering AI diagnostics; materials science with pharmacology enabling nanomedicine [3]. These convergences require researchers to transcend disciplinary boundaries and collaborate across fields that have historically operated in silos. The emerging paradigm is one in which biological questions are addressed through the lens of quantitative analysis, systems thinking, and design principles borrowed from engineering and computer science.

The importance of global collaboration and digital transformation cannot be overstated. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both the power and the necessity of international scientific cooperation. Rapid sharing of pathogen genomic sequences, acceleration of vaccine development through global clinical trial networks, and real-time epidemiological modelling all depended on collaborative infrastructure and digital connectivity [4]. At the same time, the pandemic exposed persistent inequities in research capacity and access to the benefits of innovation, underscoring the need for deliberate efforts to ensure that scientific progress serves all populations [5].

This review examines the empowerment of scientific discoveries in health and life sciences through the lens of technological foundations, translational applications, research infrastructure, and ethical considerations. By synthesising recent advances and identifying persistent challenges, the review aims to articulate a vision for sustaining and accelerating discovery in the service of human health.

2. Scientific and Technological Foundations Driving Discovery

The empowerment of scientific discovery in health and life sciences rests upon a foundation of powerful technologies that enable researchers to observe, manipulate, and model biological systems with unprecedented precision and scale. Advances in genomics and next-generation sequencing have revolutionised the resolution at which biological systems can be characterised. The cost of sequencing a human genome has fallen from approximately \$100 million in 2001 to less than \$1,000 today, making population-scale genomic studies feasible in diverse settings [6]. Third-generation sequencing technologies now enable the detection of structural variants and epigenetic modifications that were previously inaccessible, providing a more complete view of genomic variation [7]. Clinical applications of genomics have expanded

rapidly, from rare disease diagnosis to tumour profiling to prenatal screening, fundamentally altering the practice of medicine [8].

Multi-omics integration and systems biology extend beyond genomics to encompass transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, and epigenomics. The challenge lies not merely in generating these data types but in integrating them to reveal biological mechanisms. Recent computational advances have improved the ability to integrate disparate data types and extract meaningful biological insights [9]. Systems biology approaches leverage these multi-omics datasets to build predictive models of cellular behaviour, revealing emergent properties that cannot be understood by studying individual molecules in isolation. These approaches have proven particularly valuable in drug discovery, where computational models can predict drug-target interactions and identify potential off-target effects before experimental testing [10].

CRISPR and genome editing technologies have transformed the ability to manipulate DNA with precision. Beyond the original CRISPR-Cas9 system, an expanding toolkit now includes base editors that convert one DNA base to another without double-strand breaks, prime editors that enable precise search-and-replace genome editing, and CRISPR activation or interference systems that modulate gene expression without altering the underlying sequence [11]. In biomedical research, these tools facilitate the creation of disease models, the identification of drug targets through genetic screens, and the development of cell-based therapies. Clinical applications are advancing rapidly, with CRISPR-based therapies showing promise for genetic disorders including sickle cell disease, beta-thalassaemia, and certain forms of inherited blindness [12].

Artificial intelligence and machine learning in biological research have become indispensable tools for discovery. AlphaFold's demonstration of accurate protein structure prediction based on amino acid sequences represented a transformative moment, solving a fifty-year challenge in biology and opening new avenues for drug discovery and protein engineering [13]. Beyond structure prediction, AI applications now extend to image analysis in microscopy and pathology, natural language processing of scientific literature, and predictive modelling of gene regulatory networks. Foundation models capable of integrating diverse biological data types promise to accelerate discovery across multiple domains [14].

High-throughput screening and bioinformatics platforms enable systematic exploration of biological space. Automated screening platforms can test millions of compounds for activity against therapeutic targets, identify genetic interactions through CRISPR screens, or characterise the effects of environmental perturbations on cellular states [15]. Bioinformatics platforms provide the computational infrastructure for managing, analysing, and visualising the massive datasets generated by these approaches. Cloud-based platforms democratise access to advanced analytical capabilities, enabling researchers in resource-limited settings to participate in data-intensive science [16].

Table 1: Key Technologies Empowering Discoveries in Health and Life Sciences

Technology	Scientific Principle	Major Applications	Current Limitations
Next-Generation Sequencing	High-throughput parallel DNA sequencing	Rare disease diagnosis, tumour profiling, pathogen surveillance	Data storage and analysis bottlenecks; variant interpretation
Third-Generation Sequencing	Single-molecule real-time sequencing	Structural variant detection, epigenetic profiling	Higher error rates; throughput; cost
Multi-Omics Integration	Combined analysis of molecular layers	Biomarker discovery, disease subtyping, systems biology	Computational complexity; standardisation challenges
CRISPR-Cas9	RNA-guided DNA cleavage	Gene therapy, functional genomics, disease modelling	Off-target effects; delivery challenges
Base Editing	Chemical conversion of one DNA base to another	Correction of point mutations	Limited target scope; bystander edits
Prime Editing	Search-and-replace genome editing	Precise sequence corrections	Efficiency; delivery; size constraints
AlphaFold	Deep learning for protein structure prediction	Structure prediction, drug discovery	Dynamic conformations; multi-protein complexes
High-Throughput Screening	Automated testing of large compound libraries	Drug discovery, genetic interaction mapping	Cost; assay development; hit validation

3. Translational and Clinical Applications

The translation of scientific discoveries into clinical applications represents the ultimate goal of health and life sciences research. Recent years have witnessed remarkable progress in moving fundamental insights from laboratory to bedside.

Precision medicine and targeted therapeutics have transformed the approach to disease treatment. Rather than treating all patients with a given diagnosis identically, precision approaches tailor interventions to individual characteristics, including genetic makeup, molecular profiles, and environmental exposures [17]. In oncology, precision medicine has become standard of care, with tumour genotyping guiding selection of targeted therapies that inhibit specific driver mutations. The development of antibody-drug conjugates exemplifies this approach, combining the specificity of monoclonal antibodies with the potency of cytotoxic payloads to deliver treatment directly to cancer cells while sparing healthy tissues [18]. Beyond oncology, precision approaches are emerging in cardiology, where genetic testing guides dosing of anticoagulants and identifies individuals at risk for inherited cardiomyopathies, and in psychiatry, where pharmacogenomic testing informs antidepressant selection [19].

Immunotherapy and advanced biologics have revolutionised treatment for previously untreatable conditions. Immune checkpoint inhibitors, which release the brakes on anti-tumour immune responses, have demonstrated efficacy across multiple cancer types and produced durable responses in a subset of patients [20]. The identification of predictive biomarkers, such as PD-L1 expression and tumour mutational burden, enables selection of patients most likely to benefit. Chimeric antigen receptor (CAR)-T cells, engineered to recognise and eliminate cancer cells, have produced remarkable responses in haematologic malignancies and are now being refined for solid tumours [21]. Beyond oncology, biologic therapies including monoclonal antibodies, cytokine inhibitors, and fusion proteins have transformed management of autoimmune diseases, inflammatory conditions, and rare genetic disorders [22].

Regenerative medicine and stem cell therapies offer the potential to repair or replace damaged tissues and organs. Induced pluripotent stem cells, generated by reprogramming somatic cells, provide patient-specific platforms for disease modelling, drug screening, and cell therapy development [23]. Directed differentiation protocols have advanced to the point where multiple cell types—including dopamine neurons for Parkinson's disease, pancreatic beta cells for diabetes, and cardiomyocytes for heart failure—can be generated at scale and are entering clinical evaluation [24]. Mesenchymal stem cells, with their immunomodulatory and trophic properties, are being investigated for diverse applications including graft-versus-host disease, inflammatory conditions, and tissue repair [25].

Digital health, wearable technologies, and real-world data are transforming the generation and application of clinical evidence. Wearable devices continuously capture physiological parameters, physical activity, and sleep patterns, providing rich datasets that reveal health status and treatment effects in patients' daily lives [26]. Smartphone-based applications enable remote monitoring of symptoms, medication adherence, and patient-reported outcomes, supporting decentralised clinical trials and continuous care. The integration of real-world data from electronic health records, claims databases, and digital devices with genomic and molecular information supports pharmacovigilance, comparative effectiveness research, and the refinement of treatment guidelines [27].

Drug discovery acceleration through AI is addressing the historical challenges of high attrition rates and long development timelines. Machine learning models can predict drug-target interactions, optimise chemical properties, and identify potential safety issues before experimental testing [28]. Generative AI approaches can design novel molecules with desired characteristics, expanding the chemical space explored in drug discovery. In repurposing applications, AI algorithms can identify existing drugs with potential activity against new targets, accelerating the path to clinical evaluation [29]. The integration of AI throughout the drug discovery pipeline promises to reduce costs, shorten timelines, and increase success rates.

Table 2: Translational Impact of Scientific Innovations in Health and Life Sciences

Innovation	Underlying Mechanism	Clinical or Public Health Impact	Development Stage
EGFR Inhibitors	Targeting mutant EGFR driving tumour growth	Improved survival in EGFR-mutant lung cancer	Standard of care
Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors	Release of inhibitory signals on T cells	Durable responses in multiple cancer types	Standard of care
CAR-T Cell Therapy	Engineered T cells recognising tumour antigens	Curative potential in B-cell malignancies	Approved; expanding
Antibody-Drug Conjugates	Targeted delivery of cytotoxic agents	Improved outcomes in breast, bladder cancers	Multiple approvals
CRISPR Gene Therapy	Correction of disease-causing mutations	Curative potential for sickle cell disease	Approved
iPSC-Derived Cell Therapies	Patient-specific cells for transplantation	Emerging treatments for Parkinson's, diabetes	Early clinical trials
AI-Enabled Diagnostics	Machine learning analysis of medical images	Improved accuracy in radiology, pathology	Clinical implementation
Wearable Cardiac Monitors	Continuous rhythm monitoring	Detection of atrial fibrillation; stroke prevention	Widely used
mRNA Vaccines	<i>In vivo</i> antigen production	Rapid response to emerging pathogens	Approved; platform technology

4. Research Infrastructure and Collaborative Ecosystems

The empowerment of scientific discovery depends critically on infrastructure and collaborative ecosystems that connect researchers, enable data sharing, and accelerate translation.

Global research consortia and multidisciplinary networks enable the scale of data collection and analysis required for many biomedical questions. Rare disease research, which requires aggregation of cases across multiple centres, depends on international collaboration for adequate sample sizes. The Undiagnosed Diseases Network International connects programmes across multiple countries to solve mysterious conditions through combined expertise and data sharing [30]. Similarly, global cancer genomics consortia have assembled cohorts large enough to identify rare driver mutations and characterise tumour heterogeneity across populations [31]. These consortia not only generate scientific insights but also build relationships and trust that facilitate ongoing collaboration.

Open science and data-sharing initiatives are transforming the accessibility of research outputs. The FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) principles provide guidance for making data maximally useful, and their adoption is increasingly required by funders and journals [32]. Data repositories such as the European Genome-phenome Archive and the Database of Genotypes and Phenotypes enable secure sharing of human genomic and phenotypic data for research use. Preprint servers accelerate dissemination of findings before peer review, enabling rapid sharing of results during public health emergencies [33]. The challenge lies in sustaining these resources and ensuring they remain accessible to researchers globally.

Cloud computing and bioinformatics integration provide the technical infrastructure for modern data-intensive research. Scalable cloud platforms enable researchers to access and analyse massive datasets without requiring local high-performance computing infrastructure [34]. Secure research environments, such as Terra and similar platforms, provide workspaces where researchers can access data, run analytical workflows, and collaborate across institutions while maintaining compliance with privacy regulations [35].

Federated learning approaches allow models to be trained across multiple sites without centralising sensitive data, addressing privacy concerns while enabling collaborative analysis [36].

Public-private partnerships leverage complementary capabilities from academic, industrial, and philanthropic partners. Academic institutions contribute fundamental discovery, methodological expertise, and access to patients. Industry partners bring development capabilities, manufacturing expertise, and regulatory experience. Philanthropic organisations provide flexible funding and can take long-term perspectives that align with public health goals [37]. Product development partnerships, structured to share risks and rewards, have proven particularly valuable in neglected disease areas where commercial incentives are limited [38]. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the power of such collaborations, with academic-industry partnerships delivering multiple vaccines in record time [4]. Research funding models and innovation hubs shape the direction and pace of scientific discovery. Traditional grant funding, while essential for investigator-initiated research, can be risk-averse and may not optimally support interdisciplinary or translational work. Alternative models, including prize-based incentives, advanced market commitments, and venture philanthropy, are being explored to complement traditional approaches [39]. Innovation hubs that bring together diverse expertise—basic scientists, clinical researchers, bioinformaticians, regulatory specialists, and patient advocates—within structures designed to accelerate translation are proliferating globally [40]. These hubs provide physical and organisational homes for integration, supporting training, pilot funding, and regulatory guidance.

5. Ethical, Regulatory, and Societal Considerations

The empowerment of scientific discovery must be accompanied by careful attention to ethical, regulatory, and societal implications to ensure that progress serves human welfare and respects fundamental values.

Bioethics in genome editing and synthetic biology require ongoing reflection as technologies advance. Somatic gene editing for therapeutic purposes has gained broad acceptance, as evidenced by regulatory approvals for CRISPR-based therapies in sickle cell disease [12]. Germline editing, which would introduce heritable modifications, remains highly controversial, with international consensus尚未形成 on acceptable boundaries [41]. The potential for enhancement applications raises additional questions about equity, consent, and the definition of disease. Synthetic biology, which enables the construction of novel organisms, raises questions about biocontainment, ecological impacts, and dual-use concerns [42].

Data governance and privacy in AI-driven healthcare present urgent challenges. As AI systems are trained on increasingly large and diverse health datasets, ensuring that these data are collected, stored, and used ethically becomes essential [43]. Privacy concerns are heightened when data are shared across institutions or borders, requiring robust governance frameworks and technical protections such as differential privacy and federated learning [36]. The secondary use of clinical data for research, while valuable for discovery, must be balanced against patient expectations and consent requirements. Emerging frameworks for data sovereignty, which recognise the rights of individuals and communities to control their data, are gaining traction [44].

Regulatory pathways for advanced therapies are evolving to accommodate novel products that do not fit traditional categories. Gene therapies, cell-based treatments, and combination products challenge regulatory paradigms developed for small molecules and biologics [45]. Adaptive regulatory pathways, which allow iterative evidence generation and conditional approvals, are being implemented to balance timely access with robust safety evaluation. The challenge lies in maintaining rigorous standards while accommodating the unique characteristics of advanced therapies. Harmonisation of regulatory requirements across jurisdictions remains incomplete, creating challenges for global development programmes and limiting patient access in some regions.

Intellectual property and equitable innovation require careful calibration. Patent systems incentivise innovation by granting temporary monopolies, but overly broad or restrictive patents can impede further research and limit access. During the COVID-19 pandemic, debates over intellectual property for vaccines and therapeutics highlighted tensions between commercial incentives and global public health needs. Voluntary licensing arrangements, patent pools, and open-source approaches offer alternatives that seek to preserve innovation incentives while expanding access. The challenge is to design intellectual property frameworks that encourage investment in neglected areas while ensuring that resulting innovations are accessible to those who need them.

Addressing disparities in global access to health technologies is both an ethical imperative and a practical necessity. The concentration of research and development capacity in high-income countries means that the health priorities of low- and middle-income populations are often underfunded. Even when innovations reach the market, high prices and weak

health systems limit access. Ensuring equitable access requires attention to pricing, technology transfer, local manufacturing capacity, and health system strengthening [50]. It also requires research agendas that address diseases disproportionately affecting disadvantaged populations and clinical trial designs that ensure diverse participation.

6. Challenges to Sustained Scientific Empowerment

Despite remarkable progress, significant challenges threaten the sustained empowerment of scientific discovery in health and life sciences.

Fragmentation between basic and clinical research persists across multiple dimensions. Basic scientists and clinicians are often housed in separate institutions, funded by different mechanisms, and rewarded for different outputs [51]. Promotion criteria that value basic discovery publications over translational impact create disincentives for integration. Cultural differences between the hypothesis-driven approach of basic science and the patient-focused orientation of clinical medicine can hinder collaboration. Overcoming these barriers requires deliberate institutional design, including joint appointments, cross-disciplinary training, and funding mechanisms that explicitly support translational teams [52].

Reproducibility and research integrity issues undermine confidence in scientific findings. Concerns about the reproducibility of preclinical research have been widespread, with studies suggesting that many published findings cannot be replicated [53]. Causes include inadequate experimental design, selective reporting, pressure for positive results, and insufficient statistical power. In translational research, irreproducible findings waste resources, delay progress, and can lead to clinical trials based on unreliable premises. Efforts to improve reproducibility—including preregistration, registered reports, improved statistical training, and stronger incentives for replication studies—are gaining traction but require sustained commitment [54].

Infrastructure and funding disparities perpetuate inequities in research capacity. Research investment remains heavily concentrated in high-income countries, with low- and middle-income countries accounting for a small fraction of global health research spending [49]. Within countries, funding for basic and clinical research is often siloed, making it difficult to support the continuum from discovery to application. Essential infrastructure, including biobanks, data platforms, and cohort studies, requires sustained investment that is difficult to maintain in competitive funding environments [55]. Building research capacity in underrepresented regions is both an ethical imperative and a practical necessity for generating diverse datasets that represent global populations.

Interoperability of health data systems impedes integration of molecular and clinical datasets. Despite widespread endorsement of FAIR principles, implementation remains inconsistent across institutions and countries [32]. Differences in data models, terminology systems, and consent frameworks make it difficult to combine datasets for research. Electronic health record data, collected for clinical rather than research purposes, require extensive cleaning and harmonisation before they can be used for research. The

absence of globally agreed standards for linking genomic and clinical data limits the scale of integrative analyses.

Emerging infectious diseases continue to test global preparedness and response capabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that viral emergence is not a historical rarity but a recurring threat requiring sustained vigilance. Climate change, urbanisation, and ecosystem disruption are increasing the frequency and intensity of infectious disease emergence. Strengthened surveillance systems, rapid response capabilities, and platforms for vaccine and therapeutic development are essential for preparedness. Ensuring that these capabilities are distributed equitably and that responses reach all populations remains a challenge.

7. Future Perspectives

Looking forward, several converging trends will shape the future of scientific discovery in health and life sciences over the coming decade.

The convergence of biology, medicine, engineering, and computational sciences will accelerate, blurring traditional disciplinary boundaries. Advances in microfluidics, organ-on-chip technologies, and 3D bioprinting are creating new capabilities for modelling human physiology and disease *in vitro*. Bioelectronic medicine, which uses implantable devices to modulate neural circuits, represents convergence of neuroscience, materials science, and electrical engineering. The integration of these diverse fields will require new educational models and research structures that facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Personalized and predictive healthcare systems will integrate multi-omic profiling with environmental and behavioural data to enable proactive health management. Rather than reacting to established disease, these systems will use comprehensive molecular and digital phenotyping to identify risk early and intervene before disease develops. Population-scale genomic screening, combined with family history and clinical risk factors, will enable targeted prevention for individuals at elevated genetic risk. Integration of omics data into electronic health records will support clinical decision support that guides treatment selection and dosing based on individual characteristics.

Sustainable biotechnology and green innovation will address environmental challenges while creating economic value. Biological production of fuels, chemicals, and materials can reduce dependence on fossil resources and lower environmental impact. Advances in metabolic engineering and synthetic biology are expanding the range of molecules that can be produced sustainably. Integration of biological manufacturing with circular economy principles—using waste streams as feedstocks and designing for biodegradability—offers pathways to more sustainable production systems.

Strengthening global scientific resilience will require sustained investment in collaborative networks, open science infrastructure, and capacity building. The experience of COVID-19 demonstrated that pathogens do not respect borders and that preparedness must be global^[5].

Strengthened surveillance systems, distributed manufacturing capabilities for diagnostics and therapeutics, and platforms for rapid data sharing will be essential. Building research capacity in low- and middle-income countries, through training programmes, infrastructure investment, and equitable partnerships, will ensure that all nations can contribute to and benefit from scientific discovery.

The vision for the next decade in health and life sciences research is one of accelerated discovery, seamless translation, and equitable access. Researchers will be empowered by tools that enable measurement across scales, from molecules to populations. Data will flow from research platforms to clinical systems and back, continuously improving both knowledge and care. Innovations will reach all who need them, regardless of geography or economic circumstance. Achieving this vision requires sustained commitment to the principles of openness, collaboration, and equity that have driven progress to date.

8. Conclusion

This review has examined the empowerment of scientific discoveries in health and life sciences through technological foundations, translational applications, research infrastructure, and ethical considerations.

Transformative scientific advancements have fundamentally altered the landscape of biomedical research and practice. Genomic technologies have revealed the molecular basis of disease with unprecedented resolution. CRISPR enables precise manipulation of genetic material for both research and therapy. Artificial intelligence accelerates discovery and improves clinical decision-making. Immunotherapy, regenerative medicine, and precision therapeutics demonstrate the power of biologically informed treatment. Digital health and real-world data are transforming the generation and application of clinical evidence.

The strategic importance of integrating innovation ecosystems lies in the recognition that no single institution, discipline, or nation possesses all the capabilities needed to address complex health challenges. Global research consortia, open science initiatives, public-private partnerships, and innovation hubs provide the collaborative infrastructure within which discoveries are made and translated. Sustaining and strengthening these ecosystems requires deliberate investment, thoughtful governance, and commitment to equity.

The outlook for empowering future discoveries in health and life sciences is extraordinarily promising. The technical capabilities at our disposal, the creativity and dedication of the research community, and the growing recognition of science's essential role in addressing global challenges all point toward continued progress. By working together across traditional boundaries, investing in infrastructure and people, and ensuring that the benefits of discovery reach all populations, the global research community can realise the full potential of science to improve human health and well-being.

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