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Christoph Benn.

Photo: Ernesto Ryan

The government defines the sovereign and equitable development of biotechnologies among its programmatic priorities and receives support from a prominent international institution.

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[Martín Anchorena](#) writes in [Health Research](#)

🕒 7 minutes of reading

"We see Uruguay as a country deeply interested in research and development, and this new government has a particular focus on developing itself as a country at the center of biotechnology and innovation, and this is exactly in line with our philosophy," say center officials.

The Center for Global Health Diplomacy of the Joep Lange Institute (JLI), based in Geneva, Switzerland, is an institution that promotes innovative models of international cooperation in global health and works to influence policies that benefit all people. Global health diplomacy is a field that articulates negotiations and interactions between governments, civil society, multilateral agencies, and public and private funders.

In this way, the center seeks to actively contribute to achieving international health goals and building more equitable and sustainable systems that better respond to global and regional challenges.

Their authorities visited Uruguay to speak with government representatives about the new national administration's intention to promote equitable and sovereign development of biotechnology in our country.

The objective of JLI was to generate a strategic conversation about how international cooperation can strengthen the national biotechnology ecosystem, create a roadmap that follows international standards and certifications, and build bridges between local capacities, multilateral platforms, and organizations and institutions in other countries around the world.

In an interview with *La Diaria*, the institution's director, Christoph Benn, stated the following: "We see Uruguay as a very important player. It's a small country in Latin America, but it could be a pioneering country that can influence many of its larger neighbors, like Brazil or Argentina. This is why we're delighted to be here, and the new government's vision is something we truly appreciate and would like to support in any way we can."

"Uruguay is a small country, but it has brilliant people and equally brilliant scientific institutions, but we believe they could be even more effective if they were more closely connected to international organizations that also support research and science," he added.

Rafael García, JLI project manager, told *La Diaria* that the institute "tries to understand the challenges and challenges facing different countries."

"We work to best align a country's priorities with the international agenda. We identify certain countries and coordinate their initiatives where we believe there may be strategic synergies," he stated.

The center and its mission

The institute's name honors Joep Lange, a Dutch physician and researcher specializing in infectious diseases and a leading figure in the fight against HIV in the Netherlands.

Lange had a strong commitment to developing an AIDS treatment that was accessible to all, particularly to combat the epidemic in Africa. He served as president of the International AIDS Society (IAS) from 2002 to 2004 and as a professor at the University of Amsterdam.

Unfortunately, Lange died in 2014 when his plane crashed over Ukraine while en route to that country for a major international AIDS conference.

“Joep Lange was a very valuable researcher in global health and equity. He was one of the people who developed treatments, ensuring they were available in Africa and many other countries that didn't have these tools,” Benn said.

He added: “After his death, the institute was created in his name to continue his legacy; this includes his dedication to research, health, and caring for the world's poorest people. The institute continues his legacy today by promoting digital technologies and, currently, artificial intelligence [AI] in the field of health. We want to use science and its advances in new technologies like digital health and AI to improve the health of people around the world.”

For his part, García stated that “the institute's mission is to advance and expand these models of international cooperation and financing in the face of the challenges and changes the world faces.”

“Our mission is to work for human rights, for solidarity, and for equitable access to technology and knowledge,” he reaffirmed.

Uruguay and the possibility of playing an active role in vaccine development

Among the various international cooperation platforms supported by JLI, one of those promoted in our country is the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI).

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CEPI is a public-private foundation that receives donations from public, private, philanthropic, and civil society organizations and aims to fund independent research projects leading to the development of vaccines against emerging infectious diseases. It is headquartered in Norway and was founded in 2017.

García maintained that Uruguay's participation in organizations like CEPI “would allow it to convey the region's voice and perspective, benefit from these knowledge and funding networks, and also inform the country's own strategy.”

“It's about knowing where to invest, where the best opportunities are, what diseases are being observed, what the trends are, etc.,” he said.

“It would also allow them to connect their scientific base with other universities. We know they already do this, but this participation is an extra boost that gives this new administration a boost to this important commitment to innovation and development for the future, and we believe this is the right move. As a country, you have invested heavily in education, and now I think you must continue developing those capabilities so you can be a knowledge-based economy,” he added.

For his part, Benn affirms that vaccine research and development is "one of those future technologies in which Uruguay can play an important role."

"We are aware of the University of the Republic's [Udelar] plans in this regard and of its capacity, but this research is a good example of why international support is needed. No country can develop vaccines from start to finish, nor can it produce and distribute them alone," he stated.

The institution particularly recalls the COVID-19 pandemic, when the world suddenly needed a vaccine to combat this new pathogen. Research to develop this COVID-19 vaccine took just over 300 days, but it was produced in major countries like the United States and China, as well as in Europe, and many countries in the Global South struggled to access quality vaccines.

"Since the pandemic, as a global community, we told ourselves we needed to change the situation of inequality and inequity in access to vaccines and increase the capacity to develop them so they can be produced and distributed in many more places. This is where Uruguay can play a significant role for Latin America, and that's why we would like this country to play a more important role in the future. We believe they have very good scientific institutions like the University of the Republic and the Pasteur Institute," he stated.

The regulation of artificial intelligence as a tool for health

Another platform JLI promotes is Health AI. Also based in Geneva, it is a non-profit organization that aims to expand countries' capacity to regulate AI in healthcare.

Health AI works with governments, the World Health Organization (WHO), and many other stakeholders within the health innovation sector to strengthen AI governance and regulation to build trust, promote equity, and harness the potential of emerging technologies.

In addition to being the director of JLI, Benn is also the chairman of the board within this global agency for AI and health accountability.

"Uruguay has not yet fully developed regulatory agencies for the certification and validation of AI tools, and what we are offering is that we would like to work with this country to help them build their own capacity, so that Uruguay itself can validate AI tools or innovations. This requires the bridge, which is Health AI, between the international standards established in Geneva and New York, and the application of all of this in Uruguay," Benn said.

García, for his part, reflects on the "wave of innovation" in AI: "This is advancing very quickly, so countries need to quickly develop the capabilities to regulate these technologies, ensure they are safe, and, at the same time, guarantee access to and development of these technologies."

"If Uruguay is investing in the development and innovation of technologies, many of which will likely use AI, it's also important to stay up to date on how this AI will be regulated, so that companies that are investing in these resources to create new healthcare products and tools can quickly implement them in Uruguay and, why not, build this bridge with Health AI, following international standards, so that they can quickly become accessible in other markets, creating an entire ecosystem," he asserted.

The importance of being a pioneer in the region

Benn asserts that Latin America, in general, is underrepresented in international organizations like CEPI: "We believe Uruguay could be a pioneer in Latin America in supporting these coalitions by playing an active role. This is what we suggest because we feel we are aligned with this government's priorities when it comes to developing biotechnology tools. It's a win-win situation: Uruguay participates and, in turn, also has greater access to information and opportunities to establish cooperation networks."

The JLI director also asserts that Uruguay can be a pioneer because, in general, Latin America is not yet integrated into many of these organizations.

"Large countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico sometimes think they are self-sufficient, and it is often the smaller countries that manage more innovation and technology," he says.

And he adds: "Smaller countries depend more on being connected, especially in today's world, because even the largest countries can't carry out these developments on their own, even if they think they're big enough. That's why we believe that Uruguay, with this new direction this new government wants to take, presents a scenario conducive to joining other countries that have followed the same path of investment and innovation in technology."

For his part, García considers Uruguay to be a country with "quite positive" conditions, and sees it as "stable, with solid institutions, with a functioning democracy, compared to the region."

"For Uruguay to wait for the region to advance its objectives would be a mistake. Uruguay has to put itself ahead of the region and truly be the one driving it forward, because when other countries see that it's ahead and has made the right investments, they will follow suit, because it's connected to Brazil, Argentina, and the rest of Mercosur, but it's also connected to the entire region," he said.

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Rethinking Uruguay's role in the international arena: cooperation and global health as new starting points

Published on April 8

Written by [Andrea Vignolo](#) , [Andrés Coitiño](#) , [Cristoph Benn](#) , [Rafael García Aceves](#) in [Postures](#)

🕒 6 minutes of reading

The new administration taking office in Uruguay is doing so in a context of profound geopolitical transformation, the likes of which hasn't been seen for decades. In this context, multilateralism—the concerted action among countries to achieve common goals—is experiencing a crisis precisely when it is most needed. Although it may seem that its fate depends on the great powers, history shows that it has been the countries of medium influence that have been its driving forces and principal architects.

Today, faced with a new wave of imperialism and a series of simultaneous and interconnected crises—health, climate, geopolitical, and financial—these countries play a key role: they are not only in a position to defend multilateralism, but also to promote a new generation of international cooperation that is more just, inclusive, and supportive. Cooperation is based on models better equipped to address shared challenges and promote global public goods such as health, education, and climate action.

Uruguay is one of those countries. Not only does it have the conditions to do so, but it has already demonstrated its capacity and can do so again. Along these lines, global health—one of the areas hardest hit by the recent crisis—offers fertile ground for diplomatic action, aligned with the foreign and domestic policy principles and priorities expressed by the new administration.

A global health agenda with memory and purpose

Five years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is facing a new series of health threats that are testing our collective learning capacity. Have we learned anything, or are we headed toward repeating recent mistakes?

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 2025 began with 42 active health emergencies, potentially affecting an estimated 305 million people worldwide ¹ – a growing number driven by climate change and armed conflict. Added to this is the growing concern over the circulation of the H5N1 avian influenza subtype, which has begun to affect mammal populations in the United States ² , as occurred in Argentina in 2024, raising fears about possible sustained human-to-human transmission.

At the same time, worrying signs of the weakening of global health cooperation are multiplying. The announcement of the withdrawal of the United States and Argentina from the WHO, the opposition of some countries—including Paraguay and Argentina—to the international agreement for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, and the dismantling of key cooperation and financing mechanisms, such as those managed by the United States aid agency (USAID) – threaten to reverse decades of progress in surveillance, control, and response to infectious diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria.

Global health has thus become one of the main arenas where the legitimacy and effectiveness of multilateralism are at stake. And while the risk of regression is real, so is the opportunity to rethink models of international cooperation, based on learning and innovation.

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Uruguay cannot remain on the sidelines. The country—aware of the historical challenges it has faced in building a solid health system—has also experienced recent difficulties in accessing essential health technologies in a timely and equitable manner. In this new context, Uruguay can leverage its regional and international stature, along with its diplomatic capital, to build bridges, project values, and contribute to the construction of a more resilient, equitable, and cooperative global health architecture. Failure to do so would be a wasted opportunity to project the country's memory and vision in the construction of a new global health agenda that recognizes health as a global public good.

Uruguay's credentials and vision

Uruguay is not starting from scratch when it comes to global health diplomacy. Over the past two decades, it has developed capacities to contribute substantively to this agenda. From its participation in regional forums such as UNASUR-Salud and relevant Mercosur initiatives—such as the joint procurement of high-priced medicines—to its presence in global forums such as COP4 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2010) and the WHO Global Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases (2017), the country has demonstrated its ability to exercise leadership with international impact. More recently, the creation of the Uruguayan Health Intelligence Node (NISU), in partnership with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation (AUCI), reaffirmed this commitment. This initiative continued a strategy focused on South-South and Triangular cooperation, promoted by previous Frente Amplio governments and expressed, among other documents, in the country's 2030 Vision for International [Cooperation](#) .

That path is now projected with renewed ambition. The new administration has outlined a foreign policy in which solidarity, innovation, and international cooperation occupy a central place. At the same time, it has identified strengthening the National Integrated Health System (SNIS) and public health as a priority. In particular, it has expressed a strategic commitment to biotechnologies, framed within a broader policy to promote innovation, research, and scientific and technological development as drivers of economic development .

From this perspective, the global health agenda emerges as a strategic platform for integrating and coordinating national priorities with international objectives. The country can participate in solidarity initiatives, integrate into innovation networks, and reaffirm health as a global public good. Two concrete opportunities illustrate this potential.

Uruguay faces both a moral and strategic decision: opting for multilateralism with a human face, centered on equity, solidarity, and inclusion.

On the one hand, Uruguay could strengthen its role as an active partner in regional and global alliances focused on strengthening capacities for research, development, and production of medicines, vaccines, and other health technologies. Of particular note in this regard is the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), whose participation would allow the country to integrate into knowledge and R&D investment networks. Comprised of more than 30 governments and philanthropic foundations, and with an explicit commitment to equitable access to technologies to address viruses with epidemic potential, CEPI is much more than a technical platform: it is also a political space from which to exercise leadership and strengthen health sovereignty in partnership with other countries.

On the other hand, Uruguay could advance toward a new role in close collaboration with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, the main multilateral fund for global health. Although it is no longer a recipient country, its participation as a contributor in the next cycle (2027-2029) would send a clear signal: Uruguay is committed to renewed multilateralism and platforms with inclusive and representative governance, in an area where immediate and serious risks to global and regional health are observed (the Global Fund has contributed more than \$1 billion to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in the last decade alone, primarily for the fight against HIV). This step would open new channels as an interlocutor between Latin America and global governance spaces, progressively positioning itself as a country in transition to development that contributes to multilateral efforts, without ignoring the internal challenges it still faces.

Speech and action in times of uncertainty

Global health is not just a technical or scientific debate. It is also a field of political dispute, reflecting values and principles with direct consequences for people's lives. It encompasses issues of national security, human rights, access to and management of knowledge, among others. In this arena, Uruguay faces both a moral and strategic decision: opting for multilateralism with a human face, centered on equity, solidarity, and inclusion.

Health diplomacy offers a concrete channel for projecting the nation's values, as well as the vision of the new administration. It is not about competing for influence under a logic of hard power, but rather about strengthening international principles and alliances to advance fairer solutions to shared problems. Embracing this path also entails committing to transforming the financing of global public goods, such as health, by promoting more representative, sustainable, and equitable mechanisms. Uruguay, along with other countries of medium influence, can promote truly equitable regional and global alliances, where the South has a voice and decision-making capacity.

The country has the potential to go beyond the observer role. It has solid institutions, recognized technical capabilities, and a principled diplomatic track record. In a time marked by fragmentation and the weakening of international consensus, the value of a clear, coherent voice committed to the common good can make a difference. Uruguay can be one of those voices. Not because it has the greatest resources, but because it can offer vision, legitimacy, and concrete proposals.

The new administration represents an opportunity not only to reposition the country on the international stage, but also to reimagine its contribution to the world. Health diplomacy, scientific cooperation, and leadership in multilateral forums can be distinctive features of a foreign policy that connects national priorities with global challenges and reaffirms Uruguay's position as an actor committed to building a more just, healthy, and peaceful world.

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