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Science does not operate in a vacuum — institutional, national and international policies govern its remit and, more importantly, its funding, and the implications of research must in turn be addressed through policy decisions. Given its large scale and medical and ethical implications, this is particularly true of genomics. On page 966 of this issue, Susanne Haga and Huntington Willard discuss the two-way interaction between policy and genomics, and how scientists should involve themselves outside the laboratory.

Research in genomics is an international affair, and is influenced by the policies of many governments. One major player is China, who recently hosted an international genomics conference in association with Francis Collins, director of the US National Human Genome Research Institute and author of the article on page 940. China has made a strong commitment to genome research, and its contribution is likely to be an important one. When it turns its attention to the policy implications of genomics, however, some of the issues are likely to be different from those encountered in the West. With less public involvement, scientists might find their own say is increased in issues such as the privacy of personal genetic data and concerns about the applications of genetic manipulation.

Of course, differences in policy approach exist elsewhere — the insurance implications of genomic testing are different for the private health-care system of the United States and for the state-funded systems of Europe. For research prioritization, however, although there will be national variations depending on economic circumstances, many issues are shared. For example, decisions on the relative importance of completing genome sequences, starting reference sequences for more organisms and medical resequencing will have to be made together.



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