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Radical people's initiative bans clinical trials and risks to severely damage the Swiss research hub and healthcare system

The Swiss Biotech Association emphasizes the serious consequences of the radical people's initiative «Yes to the ban on animal testing and clinical trials», which will be put to the vote on February 13, 2022. In addition to banning clinical trials in Switzerland, the initiative also calls for a ban on the import of new medicines developed using clinical trials. The adoption of this initiative would have a massive impact on the Swiss healthcare system and directly threatens Switzerland as a research location. Research-oriented companies and their academic research partners in universities and university hospitals would have to stop their research work or relocate significant parts of their research and development activities abroad.

«Acceptance of the initiative would eliminate a large part of biomedical research and render the development of new drugs in Switzerland impossible. At the same time, patients in Switzerland would be denied access to innovative medicines, and comprehensive medical care in Switzerland would become impossible» says Michael Altorfer, CEO of the Swiss Biotech Association, the industry association of Swiss biotech startups and SMEs that develop innovative medicines and therapeutic methods.

Switzerland has established one of the world's leading research locations and an excellent healthcare system. Both achievements are being called into question by this radical initiative. The development of new medicines is clearly regulated by law in all countries of the world. Animal testing and clinical trials are required everywhere as a mandatory prerequisite for the approval of new drugs. Such trials therefore constitute an important framework for the development of innovative and life-saving medicines.

If the initiative were adopted, Swiss-based companies and academic research groups would no longer be able to conduct animal testing and clinical trials in Switzerland. At the same time, no new medicines developed in accordance with the internationally applicable approval rules would be allowed to be imported into Switzerland. Acceptance of the initiative would therefore have a detrimental effect on patients in Switzerland and on all innovative Swiss companies developing such vital medicines. Patients in Switzerland would no longer be able to benefit from new developments and would be forced to travel abroad to access new medicines. The most innovative Swiss research companies would be forced to leave Switzerland. The Swiss Biotech Association therefore strongly opposes this radical initiative, as it would destroy one of the most successful biotech clusters in the world and massively affect the healthcare system and patients in Switzerland.

Clinical trials and animal studies are legally required to obtain regulatory approvals for new human medicines in Switzerland and in all countries of the world

Banning research organizations and biotech/pharma companies from running clinical trials and animal studies in Switzerland, would totally isolate Switzerland internationally and force all research institutions to either abandon the development of innovative drugs or to move significant parts of their operations to any other country. Switzerland would self-impose restrictions on the development of new and innovative medicines and their international approval process, which would conflict with legally required approval processes enforced in all other countries.

Patients in Switzerland would be forced to travel abroad to access innovative treatments

As with currently approved human medicines, the approval of future medicines will need to undergo animal testing and clinical trials with healthy volunteers and patients following strict international regulations required by any country in the world. An import ban on such new drugs would directly destroy the Swiss healthcare system and deny patients in Switzerland access to new and innovative drugs.

Biomedical research and innovation are essential for a high-quality healthcare system

The proposed ban on medicine and research challenges the basic principle of a fair and inclusive healthcare system. Doctors would lose the ability to treat patients with some of the best-in-class therapies. Patients would lose their right to participate in clinical trials and benefit from therapeutic innovation.

Innovative biomedical startups and SMEs create jobs and attract international talents to Switzerland

Switzerland is a leading global hub of biomedical innovation. More than 1,000 small and medium sized biotech companies employ a highly skilled workforce of 50,000 specialists and attract the best researchers from all over the world. International investors are attracted by the high-quality research performed in the country and readily provide funding to Swiss biotech startups. In 2020, they invested CHF 3.4 billion into Swiss based companies as they recognize the value and great potential of these companies. This funding is available to the entire value-chain of startups, suppliers, hospitals, and universities. Most funding and jobs would be lost with the ban on the corresponding R&D activities. A ban would also cause the loss of a highly skilled talent pool and weaken the Swiss academic research landscape.

The Swiss biotech cluster is at the forefront of the development of novel therapies and Swiss biotech/pharma companies contribute to providing therapeutic solutions to the world

Swiss innovators are part of an integrated global effort to deliver biomedical therapeutic solutions to the world. This shared effort has grown organically over decades and has been essential in developing therapies alleviating pain and saving millions of lives. This leading role also enables Switzerland to provide a superb healthcare system and to have access to the latest innovation in medical treatments.

Animal welfare in clinical research

As with clinical trials in humans, the performance of animal testing in Switzerland is subject to the highest international standards. The strict Swiss Animal Welfare Act sets the framework. It requires efficiency, effectiveness, and respect in the conduct of tests, and their implementation is closely monitored by the cantonal authorities. Based on one of the strictest systems to reduce and to replace animal testing, in-vitro and in-silico methods are used as alternatives wherever possible. Relocating the necessary animal testing to other countries would not benefit animal welfare.

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About the Swiss Biotech Association

Founded in 1998, the Swiss Biotech Association represents the interests of the Swiss biotech industry. To support its members in a competitive market, the association works to secure favorable framework conditions and facilitate access to talents, novel technologies, and financial resources. To strengthen and promote the Swiss biotech industry, the Swiss Biotech Association collaborates with numerous partners and life science clusters globally under the brand Swiss Biotech™. For further information see [swissbiotech.org](https://www.swissbiotech.org).