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Inserm from 1964 to the present day

Since its creation in 1964, Inserm has been a major stakeholder in life and health sciences research. It has spearheaded decisive medical breakthroughs and ranks among the world's most influential research organizations. These achievements are the result of a collective scientific and human adventure, the history of which is well documented. This section brings together a range of resources tracing the Institute's history, produced and enhanced by the Inserm History Committee.

1964, Creation of Inserm

A New Institute of Excellence for Medical Research and Public Health

Inserm was created on July 18, 1964, from the transformation of the National Hygiene Institute (*Institut national d'hygiène*, INH). This new research organization continued the initiatives taken by the pioneers of hospital research within the Claude-Bernard Association, and was part of the dynamic of the "Debré Reform" in 1958, which notably gave rise to the university hospital centers (CHU). More generally, the creation of Inserm was part of the considerable effort made by France in favor of public research in the early years of the Fifth Republic, with the definition of major orientations set by the Délégation générale à la recherche scientifique et technique (General Delegation for Scientific and Technical Research) in 1959.

Missions

Inserm's original missions were the following:

- Inform the government on the country's state of health, and guide its monitoring;
- undertake studies on human health and the country's sanitary situation;
- centralize and update information on medical research activities in France and abroad;
- carry out, promote, encourage or participate in medical research, and to assist in preparatory medical research courses;
- ensure the publication of all works and studies relating to its activities.

Governance and Organization

In 1964, Inserm was placed under the authority of the Ministry of Public Health and Population. Managed by a Board of Directors, the Institute was then administered by a Director General, assisted by a Secretary General and a Scientific Director.

To implement its scientific policy (creation and evaluation of laboratories, recruitment and career management of researchers, development of scientific objectives), Inserm's management relied on a Scientific Council. An important innovation is the creation of specialized scientific commissions, the CSS, whose titles underline Inserm's interest in new biological disciplines. Among the 13 CSS from 1964-1967 were "Cell and Tissue Pathology, Oncology, Hematocytology and Radiopathology" and "Genetics, Immunology and Molecular Pathology".

The Rise of a Research Organization Entirely Dedicated to Health

Since its creation, Inserm has undergone a series of major developments that have enabled it to establish itself as a major contributor to biomedical research, on a national and international level. International partnerships are an integral part of the Institute's original culture, from the first agreements with the National Institutes of Health in the USA in 1969, to the coordination of a wide array of international research initiatives today.

On a national scale, the growth in the number of research units under Inserm's supervision - from 27 in 1964 to 391 in 2008 - reflects both the multiplication of agreements with hospital centers and the Institute's human and financial investment in new fields of research. Molecular biology, for example, was the driving force behind the innovations of the 1970s and 1980s around immunology and medical genetics, while epidemiology, neurosciences and environmental health have been strongly developed since the 1980s.

These scientific advances and the concrete innovations they entail, particularly in the field of genetics, raise questions in public opinion. The Ethics Committee, set up in 1974, enables Inserm to address these crucial issues, which call into question the relationship between research, health and society.

1983, A New Status and New Missions

In 1983, Inserm became a public scientific and technical establishment (*établissement public à caractère scientifique et technique*, EPST), operating under the authority of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Research. Its mission of developing and acquiring knowledge in the field of health, biological and medical research remained fundamental, and new ones were added, linked to economic and social issues: training, communication and information, promotion of results and international cooperation.

With these new perspectives, Inserm was quick to recognize the essential role played by patient associations in the advancement of biomedical knowledge. A pioneer in this field, the Institute structured these collaborations during the 1990s, culminating in the creation of the Associations Focus Group (*Groupe de réflexion avec les associations* - GRAM). Increased interaction with society on all health-related issues has also led to the deployment of "collective expertise", as well as the ongoing development of tools and policies to meet ethical and deontological requirements.

In the 1990s, Inserm strengthened its role in clinical research and its links with the hospital sector. The creation of clinical investigation centers (CICs) has led to the development of very high-level clinical research, involving a very close link between science and medicine.

Inserm at the Crossroads of New Research Organizations

Alongside the formalization of a coherent intellectual property strategy (patents), Inserm disseminates its innovations through partnerships with private companies. In 2000, the creation of Inserm Transfert strengthened the links between the academic and industrial research communities, in favor of innovation in biomedical and human health.

At the end of the 2000s, a reorganization of the research landscape led to the grouping of laboratories into ten thematic institutes to give them greater coherence, bringing the number of research units under Inserm supervision to around 250. The coordination of French biomedical research has also been strengthened by the creation of the Alliance pour les sciences de vie et de la santé (Aviesan), of which Inserm is a founding member.

For 60 years, Inserm has been striving to make biomedical research ever more effective, while at the same time responding to society's emerging needs. The Institute's collective expertise continue to contribute to this effort, providing independent scientific insights into specific health issues, with a perspective of supporting public decision-making on subjects such as pesticides (2021) or fibromyalgia (2020). Always at the forefront of partnerships with patient associations, Inserm is actively involved in participatory research, which enables the production of knowledge by directly involving citizens in the research process. As for the latest developments in digital health - decision support systems, digital twins, cellular modeling - Inserm is investing in them to advance science in the service of health.

Inserm, 60 Years of Scientific and Institutional Advances

1964	Foundation of the Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale (Inserm), born of the transformation of the Institut national d'hygiène, to give France an organization of excellence for biomedical research and public health
1967	Daniel Schwartz and Joseph Lellouch propose a methodology for clinical epidemiology, distinguishing between explanatory and pragmatic trials. This rigorous methodology is adopted internationally.
1968	The creation of the Institute of Human Molecular Pathology by Georges Schapira and Jean-Claude Dreyfus brought together the medical and research worlds in a way unprecedented in France, by looking at pathologies from a molecular angle. In 1990, it became the Cochin Institute of Molecular Genetics.
1969	Thanks to a collaboration with the National Library of Medicine/NIH (USA), Inserm is the first institute to provide its researchers with access to Medline, the first bibliographic database covering all biomedical fields.
1973	Jacques Glowinski and his team demonstrate the existence of dopaminergic neurons which modulate the activity of the cerebral cortex, and thus play a role in the genesis and control of cognitive functions.

1974	In the wake of the development of medical genetics, Inserm sets up its first ethics committee.
1975	André Boué's team develops the first prenatal diagnostic tests, using chromosome analysis of fetal cells obtained by amniocentesis.
1976	In collaboration with the National Cancer Institute (<i>Inca</i>), Inserm is France's coordinator for the Cancer plan launched in the United States by President Nixon. The aim is to take stock of what we know about cancer, and to boost research regarding its origins.
1979	Jean-Marie Besson and his colleagues study the mechanisms involved in pain perception. Their work has led to the identification, in animals, of neural networks directly involved in the phenomenon and its modulation.
1979	The first complete sequencing of the hepatitis B virus genome virus is carried out by Pierre Tiollais' team.
1980	Jean Dausset wins the Nobel Prize for Medicine, jointly with Baruj Benacerraf and George Davis Snell, for his research in immunogenetics. He showed that cells have HLA markers on their surface that are specific to each individual, which are important for transplantation.
1980	The teams of Bernard Roques and Jean-Charles Schwartz investigate alternatives to morphine, widely used to treat pain despite its significant side effects. Their work on enkephalins have led to the development of new analgesics and mood regulators.
1980	Pierre Ducimetière and his colleagues embark on population studies to identify cardiovascular risk factors, such as blood insulin levels or the abdominal distribution of adipose tissue. These results contributed to the international recognition of French cardiovascular epidemiology.
1981	Ketty Schwartz's team publishes initial work on molecular markers of heart failure, paving the way for a better understanding and treatment of myopathies.
1982	The birth of Amandine, "France's first test-tube baby", marks the success of the in vitro fertilization technique developed by Inserm researcher Jacques Testart and gynecologist René Frydman.
1982	Étienne-Émile Baulieu presents to the Académie des Sciences the first results of his work on RU 486, the abortion pill. This work was awarded the Lasker Prize in 1989.
1983	Sickle cell anemia is a hereditary blood disorder linked to hemoglobin malformation. Jean Rosa's team develops a test that can detect pathological mutations associated with the disease as early as 10th week of pregnancy.
1983	Inserm became a public scientific and technical establishment, under the dual authority of the Ministry of Research and the Ministry of Health. In addition to its fundamental mission of developing knowledge and biomedical research, Inserm is now responsible for training, promotion of results, communication and international cooperation.
1983	Inserm participated in the decentralization from Paris to the Regions with the creation of regional delegate administrations, followed by regional scientific advisory boards in 1985.
1983	The National Consultative Ethics Committee for Health and Life Sciences, created by presidential decree, is based at Inserm headquarters.
1983	Work by Yves Agid's team deciphers the molecular basis of Parkinson's disease, linked to dysfunctions in the production or circulation of neurotransmitters such as dopamine.
1984	The Sentinelles network was set up in France. Conceived by Alain-Jacques Valleron and his team, this system combines epidemiology and information technology: by gathering

	real-time observations from volunteer doctors in a database, it can describe, model and forecast the dynamics of epidemics.
1985	Jean Thivolet's unit succeeds in grafting the first human skin from cultured epidermis, a technique subsequently widely used, in particular to treat burn victims.
1985	Maurice Tubiana's team demonstrated the benefits of radiotherapy in the treatment of cancers, particularly thyroid cancer.
1986	The creation of Unit 304, entitled Médecine, maladie et sciences sociales (Medicine, disease and social sciences), highlights the importance of research in the humanities and social sciences in addressing public health and biomedical research issues. In 1999, the unit joined forces with CNRS and EHES to become the Center of Research in Medicine, Science, Health, Mental Health and Society (<i>Centre de recherche médecine, science, santé, santé mentale, société</i> - Cermes).
1986	Inserm launches and coordinates a multi-year HIV research program.
1987	Éliane Gluckman's team is the first in the world to successfully perform an umbilical cord blood transplant on a six-year-old boy with Fanconi anemia.
1988	Pierre Corvol's team deciphers the hormonal system that regulates blood pressure through the metabolism of water and salt: the renin-angiotensin system. This work opens the way to new treatments for hypertension, a major public health problem.
1988	The National Agency for AIDS Research (ANRS) is created, with the mission of federating, coordinating and financing AIDS research. In 2012, these missions are extended to include hepatitis B and C, and ANRS becomes an autonomous agency of Inserm.
1989	Spurred on by Marcel Goldberg, and in partnership with EDF-GDF, Inserm launches the Gazel cohort. Comprising more than 20,000 volunteer EDF-GDF employees, Gazel is the first major cohort to monitor the population over a very long term. This scientific instrument makes it possible to study a wide range of scientific questions, such as the social and economic determinants of health.
1991	Inserm is a founding member of CLORA, the Club of Associated Research Organizations. Based in Brussels, this club strengthens its members' links with the European Union in the fields of research, technology, information and innovation. CLORA has now been replaced by the Maison Irène et Frédéric Joliot-Curie.
1991	Acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) is a cancer with a particularly poor prognosis. Anne Dejean-Assémat and Hugues de Thé decipher the abnormalities that cause this form of leukemia and demonstrate the benefits of a treatment combining arsenic and retinoic acid.
1992	The creation of the first Clinical Investigation Centers (CIC) strengthened links between research and hospitals. Under the dual authority of Inserm and the French Ministry of Health, these centers bring together healthcare staff and researchers to carry out clinical research protocols on site.
1993	Jean-Marc Egly's team uncovers the transcription factor TFIIH, the conductor of an extremely sophisticated molecular mechanism that not only enables gene transcription to lead to protein production, but also DNA self-repair and the balance of the cell life cycle.
1993	Inserm launches its first <i>expertises collectives</i> (collective expert assessments) in response to the public authorities' demand for decision-making tools in the field of public health. For each topic covered, a multidisciplinary group of renowned scientists in their fields

	selects, analyzes, discusses and synthesizes data from the international scientific literature.
1995	Pioneers of pediatric genetics in France, the teams of Jean Frézal and Arnold Munnich have worked on the molecular basis of numerous diseases. Their research has identified the gene whose alteration leads to spinal muscular atrophy.
1996	The conclusions of the Inserm collective report on asbestos have led the French authorities to ban its use.
1996	Jean-Laurent Casanova's research into genetic susceptibility to infectious diseases has led to the identification of mutations involved in mycobacterial infections.
1997	The work of Claude Griscelli and Alain Fischer allow the identification of the genes responsible for an immunodeficiency syndrome, Griscelli disease. This research led to the development of gene therapy protocols to cure "bubble babies".
2000	Inserm Transfert, a subsidiary of Inserm, was set up to promote the research carried out in its laboratories. By identifying know-how and inventions with strong industrial potential, Inserm Transfert coordinates the development of innovative health products.
2000	The Inserm Medical Research Awards are established. In addition to the Grand Prix, which pays tribute to a leading figure in French scientific research, awards for research and research support are awarded to researchers and technicians whose work has led to remarkable progress.
2003	The Inserm Liliane Bettencourt School opens its doors to enable medical, pharmaceutical and dental students to receive training in research. This dual curriculum will enable them to combine research with clinical practice.
2004	Pierre Chambon wins the Albert-Lasker Prize for Basic Medical Research for his work on eukaryotic gene structure and regulation.
2004	The creation of the Association Focus Groups (<i>Groupes de réflexion avec les associations de malades</i> - GRAM), chaired by Ketty Schwart until 2007, strengthens the links between Inserm and the associative world. The GRAM fosters relations between researchers and patients, and contributes to Inserm's determination to make patient associations true partners in medical research.
2008	Françoise Barré-Sinoussi and Luc Montagnier jointly receive the Nobel Prize in Medicine for their discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the retrovirus responsible for AIDS, achieved in 1983 with Jean-Claude Chermann.
2009	X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy (X-ALD) is a severe brain disease of genetic origin. Patrick Aubourg and Nathalie Cartier's team develop a strategy to halt its progression, based on the transplant of autologous bone marrow cells, genetically modified to produce the protein that patients lack.
2009	Inserm is a founding member of the National Alliance for Life Sciences and Health (<i>Alliance nationale pour les sciences de la vie et de la santé</i> - Aviesan), which brings together all academic players in life and health sciences research. It relies on multi-organization thematic institutes to optimize the strategic, scientific and operational coordination of biomedical research.
2013	Led by Jean-François Delfraissy, the creation of the multidisciplinary REACTing consortium sets up an inter-institutional network of research teams on emerging infectious diseases. The platform is coordinated by Inserm.
2013	Inserm's collective expertise on pesticides and their effects on health has led to the recognition of Parkinson's disease as an occupational disease in farmers.

2014	Alim-Louis Benabid receives the Lasker Award for his work on deep brain stimulation in the treatment of Parkinson's disease. Between 1987 and 1991, he and his team developed a technique for implanting electrodes in the brains of patients with severe and resistant forms of the disease, in order to deliver high-frequency electrical stimulation that led to the disappearance of their motor disorders.
2015	Inserm is ranked 1st European academic patent filer in biomedical research by the European Patent Office.
2017	The Nutri-score, based on the work of Serge Hercberg's team, is introduced in France. Voluntary producers affix nutritional labels to the front of packaging. Several European countries recommend this system to help consumers make informed food choices.
2017	Invented by Mickael Tanter's team, the simple, portable technology of functional ultrasound neuroimaging is used for non-invasive ultrasound imaging of newborn brain activity. This breakthrough opens up unprecedented prospects for bedside neurological diagnosis of full-term and premature babies.
2018	Genetic characterization of the Ebola virus, at the origin of the 9th epidemic raging in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been successfully completed thanks to collaboration between the National Institute of Biomedical Research of Kinshasa and Inserm. This is a fundamental step towards accelerating the management and deployment of vaccines and possible treatments such as antivirals or neutralizing antibodies.
2019	Inserm leads the European Joint Programme on Rare Diseases (EJPRD), a large-scale European program on rare diseases involving 130 institutions in 35 countries.
2019	Jérôme Galon is awarded the European Inventor Award by the European Patent Office for his Immunoscore. This test predicts the risk of recurrence of certain cancers by analyzing the immune cells in tumor tissue. It enables doctors to choose the treatment best suited according to their patients' risks.
2019	Serge Picaud and his team at the Vision Institute (<i>Institut de la vision</i>) demonstrate using animal models that it is possible to induce high-resolution visual perception using an artificial retina device manufactured by Pixium Vision.
2020	ANRS is transformed with the creation of ANRS-MIE, an independent Inserm agency for research into HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis and emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.

Past and present directors :

1964-1969: Eugène Aujaleu
1969-1979: Constant Burg
1979-1982: Philippe Laudat
1982-1996: Philippe Lazar
1996-2001: Claude Griscelli
2001-2007: Christian Bréchet
2007-2014: André Syrota
2014-2018: Yves Lévy
2018: Claire Giry (interim)
2019-2023: Gilles Bloch
2023-today: Didier Samuel