

Observations of the CEO of Inserm



ASSESSMENT REPORT OF INSERM

Observations Letter

December 5th, 2025

Inserm wishes to express its sincere appreciation for the quality, balance and depth of the evaluation carried out by the assessment committee chaired by Professor Anna Dominiczak, and HCERES. The final report provides a clear and constructive analysis of the institution's strengths, challenges and future directions, and will serve as a valuable reference for guiding Inserm's strategic development in the coming years.

The institution welcomes the recognition of its "high reputation for excellence in Europe and worldwide" and the acknowledgement that Inserm has "remarkably amplified its actions" in recent years, particularly in the areas of innovation, participation in European programmes, and scientific and societal communication. These achievements reflect the strong commitment of our teams and confirm the relevance of the strategic orientations pursued. The report's encouragement to further strengthen Inserm's European presence and to build a more visible and targeted international strategy is fully aligned with the priorities set by the CEO.

The report also highlights the strong involvement of Inserm's top management in the newly created health research programme agency and acknowledges its "good start." Inserm shares the view that the consolidation and stabilisation of the programme agency is now essential. Substantial work is already underway to define and structure the agency as a robust, coherent entity within Inserm, capable of coordinating ambitious national research programmes and of defining, together with its scientific partners, strategic research priorities. Inserm also underlines the importance of fully recognising its dual role—as a national coordinator of research efforts through the programme agency, and as a research operator. We welcome the recommendations aimed at clarifying the agency's scope, objectives and budgets, in close coordination with the French State.

The evaluation underscores the importance of deepening partnerships with universities.

Inserm fully agrees that strengthening these collaborations is essential for the national research ecosystem. However, the institution wishes to emphasise that the dynamics initiated over the past two years—both at site level within our joint research units and nationally within the governance of the programme agency—are more extensive than reflected in the report. The work undertaken with universities, university hospitals and research centres to enhance local coordination, co-develop site strategies, empower unit directors and simplify operational processes has become a cornerstone of Inserm’s institutional transformation. We regret that these advances may not have been fully perceived, as they represent one of the central pillars of the actions currently being implemented. We already consider universities as site coordinators of research, and we are fully engaged in a process of co-constructing biomedical research strategies with universities, academic hospitals and other research organisations. In addition, we recently signed an agreement between Inserm, universities and academic hospitals to jointly build research strategies on university sites.

Inserm also takes note of the bibliometric analysis and shares the view that the institution can aspire to even stronger international performance. It nevertheless wishes to point out an important methodological limitation:

the restriction of publication data to researchers formally affiliated with Inserm does not reflect the fundamental model of joint research units. Once Inserm has accredited a unit, both its financial and service contributions and its scientific output are considered collectively by all institutional partners. A bibliometric approach that accounts for the full publication output of UMRs would therefore provide a more accurate representation of Inserm’s scientific activity and strategic footprint. In addition, Inserm’s weight is underestimated by the use of an inadequate disciplinary perimeter; for example, environmental biology and ecology—fields outside Inserm’s core mission—should not be included in the comparison.

More broadly, Inserm welcomes the strategic orientations outlined in the report, which reinforce many key priorities already underway.

These include the consolidation of the programme agency; the strengthening of Inserm’s European and international engagement; and greater investment in population health. In this respect, we believe our robust work on nutrition, environmental toxicants and addictions, as well as health inequalities (including socio-economic aspects), addresses major areas of public health. For instance, Inserm plays a recognised leadership role at European level through its contribution to the development and scientific validation of the Nutri-Score. However, we agree that there are some domains where Inserm is less active, as the panel highlights. The report also encourages sustained preparedness for future health crises. Inserm stresses that significant progress has already been achieved in terms of research preparedness and response to infectious outbreaks. ANRS-MIE, created in 2021 within Inserm, ensures permanent real-time monitoring of emerging

pathogens; Inserm and ANRS-MIE jointly lead the PEPR Emerging Infectious Diseases launched in 2023; Inserm recently initiated the national France Vaccine programme; and ANRS-MIE coordinates the “Be Ready” preparedness initiative at European level, with more than 80 institutions, from 27 countries partners. These initiatives illustrate Inserm’s commitment to strengthening national and European resilience to infectious threats.

Inserm acknowledges the committee’s observations regarding the mobilisation of resource-allocation levers to support its scientific priorities. It nonetheless wishes to put this assessment into perspective: the institution already earmarks several positions for specific units, notably for engineering, technical and administrative staff, as well as for certain researcher profiles such as those recruited through the junior professor chairs scheme. While a large share of researcher recruitment continues to depend on national competitive examinations, Inserm is also reinforcing strategic recruitment through programmes such as ATIP Avenir, which foster scientific excellence, and contrats d’interface, which strengthen its priorities at the interface with the medical field. Finally, Inserm is exploring ways to better align operational funding of its units with its strategic priorities. These efforts will contribute to a more coherent and effectively implemented scientific strategy.

Drawing on its external perspective, the committee also encourages Inserm to further reinforce its external evaluation mechanisms. The institution fully shares the ambition of ensuring that its units and strategic programmes are assessed according to the highest international standards and is ready to further strengthen the systematic use of external, international expertise. While the specialised scientific committees (CSS) already include a large proportion of internationally recognised experts working in France, Inserm acknowledges that additional progress is possible—particularly by increasing the involvement of experts currently working outside France. Beyond the CSS, most ad hoc evaluation committees—ATIP-Avenir, Chairs, Cancer Plan—already involve international experts. Inserm also welcomes the recommendation to continue moving away from quantitative indicators in individual assessment. This transition, already well advanced, is reflected in an evaluation framework centred on a selection of meaningful achievements across scientific, clinical, societal and economic impact, together with teaching, open science practices and contributions to collaborative and translational research. Inserm’s recent work within CoARA represents a formal consolidation of this long-standing approach, and the CoARA action plan currently being developed will propose further measures.

Regarding support functions, Inserm fully shares the committee’s view that its HR policy must better integrate the needs arising from the growth of contract-based employment. This transition is already underway, notably through the inclusion of more comprehensive data on contract staff in the unified social report. Inserm already considers contract staff as an integral part of our community and, as such, benefit from our training policy, contributing not only to their professional development but also to their ability to succeed in their future career paths. In terms of financial management, Inserm agrees that analytical accounting could be a useful future tool, but only once the new budget and accounting information system deployed in 2025 has been fully stabilised. More broadly, Inserm supports the objective of enhancing budget transparency—made complex by the diversity of its missions and associated funding—and will work towards this in close coordination with its supervisory authorities.

Inserm thanks HCERES once again for the quality of its analysis and for the constructive spirit that guided this evaluation. As stated by the jury, its recommendations aim to “enable Inserm to achieve its full potential for the benefit of the French and European health research community and society as a whole.” Inserm confirms that they will be taken into account in the preparation of its future COMP. The final report will have a direct impact on Inserm’s strategic steering and support the evolution of the organisation to meet more effectively the upcoming challenges of health research in France, in Europe and internationally. Building on these findings and recommendations, Inserm reaffirms its commitment to fully playing its role, supported by the high dedication of its teams—whose engagement it warmly acknowledges—and together with all its partners.



Pr Didier Samuel
President and CEO