

Estonia becomes first nation to provide state-sponsored DNA testing

Estonia, a former Soviet territory nestled in the Baltic region between Latvia and Russia, has become the first nation to provide [state-sponsored genetic testing and advice](#)—to 100,000 of its 1.3 million residents. Government knowledge of citizens' DNA architecture may sound like a scary prospect—but it's a complicated issue.

"I think it's an ambitious effort," said Laura Hercher, Director of Research in Human Genetics at Sarah Lawrence College and co-founder of [The DNA Exchange](#).

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Most state biobank initiatives aggregate data anonymously for medical research. This is what sets the Estonian program apart: DNA donors, in this case, elect to receive certain kinds of information about their genetic makeup.

After a participant's DNA is analyzed for more than 600,000 DNA variants that have been linked to both common and rare diseases, she can [ask to find out](#) about the risks of breast cancer—but request not to see information about rare disorders she could transmit to future children.

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"There's a lot of potential for giving people both complicated information, hard-to-understand information, or wrong information if you give out things that we don't know well, and that we haven't studied not only among sick people but also among healthy people," [said Hercher].

The Estonian government—as well as other governments faced with the same decisions—will have to grapple with whether or not public health concerns outweigh medical advances.

Read full, original post: [Would You Give the Government Your Genome?](#)