

Genetic research equity: Why researchers are sequencing genomes of 500,000 people of African ancestry

An industry-academic initiative announced [October 18] aims to create the largest ever database of genomes exclusively from people with African ancestry. Four biopharma companies contributing \$80 million have teamed up with Meharry Medical College to launch the effort, which hopes to recruit up to 500,000 African Americans and people from Africa and combine their DNA and medical data into a biobank for health studies.

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The lack of representation means disease-causing mutations unique to Africans are missed. And tools for predicting disease risks or treating patients that were developed with data from those of European descent—[may not work as well in patients with African ancestry](#). These “are aspects of human genomes that can only be studied in African populations,” says genetic epidemiologist Charles Rotimi, scientific director of NIH’s National Human Genome Research Institute.

Researchers like Rotimi who have heard about the new effort say it will fill a huge gap. “It’s about time that we focus on a more comprehensive view of the genome of humans everywhere,” Rotimi says. “It’s particularly important for African ancestry populations, given the evolutionary history of humanity.”

[**This is an excerpt. Read the full article here**](#)