



# Harnessing the promise of Latin American science

Researchers and attendees from around the world gathered at the opening reception of Voices of Latin American Science, hosted by Einstein Hospital Israelita in São Paulo on May 6.

*Demonstrating potential but facing challenges, Latin America is moving from study subject to principal investigator, say scientists at an event hosted by Einstein Hospital Israelita.*

For decades, Latin America has been a source of scientific data, biological diversity, and research talent for the rest of the world. Increasingly, researchers across the region want it to become something more: a driver of scientific discovery in its own right.

That ambition has emerged despite chronic underinvestment. In most countries in the region, 60–80% of research funding comes from the federal government, yet that investment accounts for less than half a percent point of most countries' GDP. "Even under adverse conditions, our science has continued to advance," says Sidney Klajner, president of Einstein Hospital Israelita, in Brazil. "The next step is to create the conditions for this progress to occur on a larger scale, with greater autonomy and a stronger capacity for global impact."

Klajner's remarks set the stage for a global convening of scientists, Voices of Latin American Science, which Einstein hosted in São Paulo on May 6. The event brought together panelists from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, as well as France, Portugal, and the U.S., for discussions on how Latin America can move from being primarily a subject of global study to a driver of scientific innovation. More than 400 people attended the event.

Throughout the discussions, speakers returned to a common theme: Latin American science has faced structural challenges such as unstable and uneven funding, limited infrastructure, and low visibility—and yet scientific progress has continued, with real signs of opportunity ahead.

## Resilience in the face of constraints

Across conversations at the gathering, researchers described a scientific ecosystem defined by both constraint and ingenuity. Since moving from the U.S., Kenneth Gollob, director of the Center for Research in Immuno-oncology at Einstein, has worked at several institutions throughout Brazil. Gollob notes, for example, how the difficulty of importing reagents slows down research.

As a visiting researcher at the U.S. National Cancer Institute, "I can standardize a whole new methodology with 50 antibodies in 2 months," he says. In Brazil, the same process could take up to a year because of import difficulties.

At the same time, such constraints lead to creativity and adaptability in research. For example, researchers may run many experiments in parallel to address their reagent constraints.

To translate discoveries made in Latin America into real-world impact, entrepreneurship opportunities will need to expand—for example, through venture capitalists accepting a smaller share of the companies they fund. "We don't know where the next great discovery will come from," Gollob says, "but these translation channels for the population are critical."

To this end, Einstein has recently created Joint Innovation Centers to establish long-term relationships with companies. The centers will develop impactful research and technologies for these organizations and for the healthcare system, meeting national demands with global potential while expanding access to healthcare. The initiative will also create jobs for highly qualified Latin American researchers, reducing the brain drain to other regions.

## Shifting the bureaucratic burden

The same structural limitations that slow laboratory work also shape how research institutions operate more broadly. For example, in Brazil, political instability leads to swings in the amount of funding available, says Fernanda De Negri, secretary of science, technology, and innovation for Brazil's Ministry of Health.

"Many times, you have a lot of funding; sometimes you have nothing," she says. This instability is a problem because "science happens in the long term." Funding stability is most critical not for individual projects, she notes, but for whole areas of study of national or global relevance.

"[In Brazil], we have a load of bureaucracy and an excess of regulation, and this certainly harms the development of research," says Aline Pacífico, research planning and development manager at Einstein. She stresses the need for research administrators who can absorb some of this bureaucratic burden,



## A global gathering

Voices of Latin American Science convened panelists from institutions throughout Latin America, as well as Europe and the U.S.

### Brazil

#### Opening Ceremony

Sidney Klajner (Einstein)  
 Fernando Bacal (Einstein)  
 Claudio Lottenberg (Einstein)

#### Panels

Aline Pacífico (Einstein)  
 Antonio José Roque da Silva (Brazilian Center for Research in Energy and Materials)  
 Esper Kallás (Butantan Institute)  
 Fernanda De Negri (Ministry of Health of Brazil)  
 João Viola (Brazilian National Cancer Institute)  
 Kenneth John Gollob (Einstein)  
 Luciana Pereira Almeida de Piano (Einstein)

Marcella Ohira (Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research)  
 Monica Felts de La Roca Soares (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development)  
 Pedro Alves Lemos Neto (Einstein)  
 Ricardo Weinlich (Einstein)  
 Vinicius Maracajá-Coutinho (Advanced Center for Chronic Diseases; also Chile)

### Chile

Cristian Morales (Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization)  
 Nayat Sánchez-Pi (Inria Chile; also France)  
 Vinicius Maracajá-Coutinho (Advanced Center for Chronic Diseases; also Brazil)

### Argentina

Juliana Cassataro (National Scientific and Technical Research Council)  
 Pablo Rafael Kreimer (National Scientific and Technical Research Council)

### France

Nayat Sanchez-Pi, also Chile (Inria Chile)  
 Patrice Debré (Sorbonne University)

### Portugal

António Coutinho (European Molecular Biology Organization)

### U.S.

Peter Libby (Harvard Medical School)

handling issues of institutional compliance and funding so that researchers can focus on science.

## Opportunities

Following recent changes to clinical trial laws, Brazil's share of global clinical trials grew from 1.8% in 2024 to 2.2% in 2025, with the nation poised for future growth. De Negri says some companies in the sector now count Brazil—the South American country with the highest participation in clinical trials—among the top five research hubs globally.

South America's biological, ethnic, and cultural diversity may prove invaluable for the future of precision medicine. For example, most drugs administered in Latin America are developed using majority-white data sources such as the UK Biobank, and most clinical trials are held in the Global North. Latin America's genetic and epidemiological diversity is missing from the global data set. Running more clinical trials in Latin America could lead to the development of pharmaceuticals that work better for more people around the world.

Many scientific collaborations by Latin American countries are asymmetric and oriented outside of Latin America—for example, with the U.S. or Europe. Inter-regional collaboration among Latin American countries is an untapped opportunity. For example, the region is uniquely positioned to answer local questions of ecosystems, epidemiology, and genomics—issues that span national borders, but which the Global North has little incentive to prioritize.

## Science close to home

The discussions also highlighted how broader social and political conditions shape scientific careers in the region.

Panelist Juliana Cassataro, a senior researcher at Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council and an associate professor at the National University of San Martin in Argentina, notes how dramatically social policies can influence scientists' careers. When she was working toward her degree, "as biologists, we didn't believe that we would work in Argentina because there were no research careers at the time that would allow us to stay and have a permanent post," she says.

She feels lucky that when it came time to start her career as a researcher, conditions had shifted enough that she was able to return. Now, Cassataro is involved in developing Argentine vaccines and other patented innovations. "Working on projects that are for your region, for your country, is something truly unique," she says.

The conversations convened by Einstein reflected a broader shift underway: Latin American science is no longer asking whether it belongs on the global stage, but how large a role it will play.

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