

Green light for unique gene research project

Written by Johan Nylander

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- [Stockholm pioneers life science research](#)

Sweden's government has given the green light for a unique medical research project involving large-scale population registration and bio-banks. The aim is to learn more about diseases like cancer, diabetes and asthma and make Sweden a world leader in data-based research.

The research project LifeGene -- led by the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm -- is Sweden's largest medical research project ever and is unique in the world.

Nancy Pedersen, director of LifeGene and professor in genetic epidemiology, explained that the purpose of the project is to be able to study risk and protective factors for common complex diseases and health.

"In some cases, we hope to be able to discover biomarkers that will help us better personalize treatments. In others, we hope to be able to better design preventative measures", she told The Swedish Wire.

"I anticipate that numerous different research questions will be enabled through the LifeGene cohort and biobanking materials".

The LifeGene project was initially launched in 2010 with the goal to collect health information from about 500,000 people aged 0-45 years to see how genes, environment and lifestyle affect our health.

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However, last year Sweden's Data Inspection Board put a halt to the project because of the sensitivity of mass-storing data on the country's citizens.

The government has now announced a number of measures to improve conditions for register-based research, with the aim of making Sweden a world leader in data-based research. The new rules involve a change of the constitution and a legislative change.

Minister for Education Jan Björklund said research needs to be balanced against individual privacy.

"Cancer, diabetes and heart disease cause much suffering. Record-based research can help us get closer to solving these diseases' riddles", he said.

"Sweden should be a world leader in data-based research, but we must become better at exploiting the wealth we have".

LifeGene could be helpful in research on the most common diseases and health problems, such as asthma, allergies, infections, obesity, repetitive strain injuries, chronic fatigue and pain.

"We are of course very happy about the new rules which will be put in place. This is important for all the population-based prospective studies that Sweden is so well known for", Nancy Pedersen said.

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