

# High-level commission focuses on law's power to significantly improve world's health

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Law should be viewed as a major determinant of health and safety and can be utilized as a powerful and innovative tool to address pressing global health concerns, says a newly formed, high-level commission announced today by the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University in partnership with *The Lancet*.

In their "Comment" published online in *The Lancet*, the Commission's co-chairs Lawrence O. Gostin and John T. Monahan, along with the Commission's project coordinator, Mary C. DeBartolo, and Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet*, say the aims of the Commission are to "define and systematically describe the current landscape of [law](#) that affects [global health](#) and safety" and that the group will "make the case for the power of law to improve health while revealing current opportunities and challenges under the status quo."

The authors point to three recent events—the Ebola crisis in West Africa, current international litigation implicating the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, and the push for Universal Health Coverage—that demonstrate how "the interaction between national, subnational, and international law, together with the influence of many legal spheres, illustrate the power—and the weakness—of law as a tool."

The Commission's inaugural meeting is scheduled for April 22 and 23 at the O'Neill Institute at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C. Over the next year and a half, the Commission

specifically aims to: (1) identify evidence-based means by which law can contribute to improved health and safety outcomes; (2) enhance the ways in which health and safety are prioritized in law and policy; and (3) examine how international organisations, governing processes, and instruments can support, reinforce, and incentivize countries' development of domestic laws to improve their public's health and safety.

Members of the Commission will reflect diverse geographical backgrounds and multiple sectors such as international organizations, governments, academia and society. Its leadership is based at the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University. Gostin, a co-chair of the Commission, is University Professor, Georgetown University's highest academic rank conferred by the University President. He is faculty director the O'Neill Institute and is the founding O'Neill Chair in Global Health Law. Monahan, also a co-chair, is Senior Advisor for Global Health to the Georgetown University President. He is Senior Scholar at the O'Neill Institute and Senior Fellow at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown. DeBartolo, the Commission's project coordinator, is an Associate at the O'Neill Institute. ([A full list of commissioners and disclosures can be found here.](#))

"The power of law is not simply to create a rule of law, but more fundamentally to achieve the aspiration of a world that can enjoy the highest attainable standard of health," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Read the full Comment, "[Law's Power to Safeguard Global Health: \*The Lancet\* - O'Neill Institute, Georgetown University Commission on Global Health and the Law.](#)"

Provided by O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law

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