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World Health Assembly endorses new plan to increase global access to vaccines

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Ministers of Health from 194 countries at the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly today endorsed a landmark Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP), a roadmap to prevent millions of deaths by 2020 through more equitable access to existing vaccines for people in all communities.

The GVAP was coordinated by the Decade of Vaccines Collaboration, a group of leading international vaccine experts, and represents the collective vision of hundreds of global health stakeholders to extend the full benefits of immunization to all people, regardless of where they are born, who they are, or where they live.

Currently, four out of every five children receive at least a basic set of vaccinations during infancy that allow them to lead healthy, productive lives. However, this means 20 percent of children still do not benefit from basic immunization.

This comprehensive plan involves four mutually reinforcing goals: strengthening routine immunization to meet vaccination coverage targets; accelerating control of vaccine-preventable diseases with polio eradication as the first milestone; introducing new and improved vaccines; and spurring research and development for the next generation of vaccines and technologies. The plan is expected to reduce global childhood mortality, surpassing the targets of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal 4.

"The Global Vaccine Action Plan focuses on the health needs of people

at all stages of life," said Dr. Flavia Bustreo, Assistant Director-General for Family, Women's and Children's Health of the World Health Organization. "The plan promotes greater coordination and synergies between immunization and other child, adolescent and reproductive health interventions leading to healthier communities everywhere."

"While immunization already prevents millions of deaths and uncounted illness, we cannot rest until life-saving, cost-effective vaccine technology reaches people in every community and every country through this global plan," said Dr. Ciro de Quadros, Executive Vice President of the Sabin Vaccine Institute and co-chair of the Decade of Vaccines Collaboration's Steering Committee.

Following today's approval by the World Health Assembly, the GVAP will be adapted for implementation at the regional and country level. Country involvement in this process reinforces a key tenet of the GVAP, which is to increase national ownership of immunization programs. The collaboration will also establish a monitoring and evaluation framework and finalize estimates for funding needs as well as potential cost savings.

"By supporting countries to strengthen their health systems and introduce powerful vaccines that prevent the biggest killers of children, we can have a dramatic impact on the lives of millions of people. We need to work together to make the vision of the Global Vaccine Action Plan a reality, and I am proud that GAVI will play its part in this," said Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of the GAVI Alliance.

Innovation is a guiding principle of the GVAP beyond the vaccines themselves. The plan identifies priorities for improving program efficiency and increasing vaccine coverage. This includes the use of modern communication technologies for immunization programs; research to understand the cultural, economic and organizational determinants of immunization; and the development of diagnostic tools

for conducting surveillance in low-income countries. The plan also focuses on building capacity and human resources in low- and middle-income countries to conduct research and development and operational research.

"We know vaccines work to save and improve lives," said Dr. Chris Elias, president of the global development program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "We must urgently work to reach all children with the vaccines they need."

Lending further support to the Decade of Vaccines, world health ministers also endorsed a resolution declaring polio a global public health emergency. The eradication of polio is a critical step in protecting all children from vaccine-preventable diseases and is an important early milestone in the Decade of Vaccines.

A large and diverse group of stakeholders representing 290 organizations – including representatives and elected officials, health professionals, academics, manufacturers, global agencies, development partners, civil society, media and the private sector in more than 140 countries – contributed their expertise to the development of the GVAP in a year-long consultation process.

"It is unacceptable that children are still dying from diseases that are preventable with existing vaccines," said Dr. Abdul Majeed Siddiqi, Head of Mission for HealthNet TPO in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Chair of the GAVI Civil Society Steering Committee. "This is an actionable plan across the discovery, development and delivery of vaccines - now we must all do our part to make it happen."

Key representatives from the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the GAVI Alliance, the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the African Leaders

Malaria Alliance had central roles in the DoV Collaboration Leadership Council and working groups.

Provided by Sabin Vaccine Institute

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