

# A REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP (NITAGs)

## FUNCTION OF NITAGs

NITAGs are multidisciplinary country-level expert committees tasked with providing independent, *evidence-based* advice to policymakers and programme managers on immunization and *vaccine policy* issues.

### NITAGs

#### Role

NITAGs provide *scientific recommendations* to respective Ministries of Health to inform National Immunization Plan.

NITAGs also advise on public health needs and address vaccine quality and safety issues.

#### Problem

Information on the transparency, accountability, level of authority and degree to which the membership of NITAGs represents a life course approach to immunization is both *scarce and inconsistent*.

## METHODOLOGY

Comprehensive environmental scans of NITAGs in *34 countries* across WHO regions using a framework that integrates the six World Health Organization (WHO) process indicators of NITAG functionality and the TAPIC governance framework <sup>1-3</sup>.

## WHO PROCESS INDICATORS

1. Legislative or administrative basis

2. Formal terms of reference

3. At least five areas of expertise represented among its membership

4. At least one meeting per year

5. Distribution of the agenda and background documents at least one week prior to meetings

6. Mandatory disclosure of conflict of interest

## WHO Immunization Agenda 2030 (IA2030) and UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (the UN Decade)

The IA2030 and the UN Decade are aligned in their life course approach to immunization as an effective public health intervention that promotes healthy ageing.

National Immunization Strategies (NIS) are informed by population-based NITAG recommendations across the life course which must include those most at-risk of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD) including older adults <sup>3</sup>

Vaccination throughout life can be enacted through the lens of the four action areas of UN Decade (integrated care, long term care age-friendly environments and combatting ageing) using the key enablers (voice and engagement, leadership, capacity building and research and innovation) to maintain and improve intrinsic capacity and functional ability <sup>4</sup>

## FINDINGS

2.

**Accountability**  
Just over one-half (56%) of NITAGs have processes and policies to manage conflicts of interests

4.

**Integrity**  
40% of NITAGs circulate agenda and background documents at least one week prior to meetings

**Transparency**  
Less than one-third (32%) of NITAG recommendations are publically available

1.

**Participation**  
No (0%) NITAGs include participation from civil society organizations regardless of their expertise in ageing and immunization

3.

**Capacity**  
17% of NITAGs (France, El Salvador, and Canada) have an expert member in the field of ageing and immunization

5.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Call on WHO to include a process indicator that reflects membership of the NITAG across the life course approach and therein includes expertise in ageing and immunization.

Call on governments to improve transparency and availability of public information on NITAG processes and its recommendations.

Call on governments to recognize the importance of NITAGs in the independent assessment of epidemiological data and deliberations that inform vaccine recommendations and policy.

### References:

- Panero MS, Khuri-Bulos N, Biscayart C, Bonvehí P, Hayajneh W, Madhi SA. The role of National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAG) in strengthening health system governance: Lessons from three middle-income countries—Argentina, Jordan, and South Africa (2017–2018). *Vaccine*. 2020 Oct 21;38(45):7118–28.
- Greer SL, Wismar M, Figueras J. Strengthening health system governance. Better policies, stronger performance. *European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies Series [Internet]*. 2016 [cited 2023 Apr 11];1–290. Available from: [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/307939/Strengthening-health-system-governance-better-policies-stronger-performance.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/307939/Strengthening-health-system-governance-better-policies-stronger-performance.pdf)
- MacDonald NE, Duclos P, Wichmann O, Henaff L, Harnden A, Alshammary A, Tijerino RA, Hall M, Sacarlal J, Singh RR. Moving forward on strengthening and sustaining National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) globally: Recommendations from the 2nd global NITAG network meeting. *Vaccine*. 2017 Dec 15;35(50):6925–30.
- World Health Organization. Guidelines for developing a national immunization strategy (NIS) [Internet]. [cited 2023Apr12]. Available from: [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/immunization/mi4a/ia2030\\_nis\\_guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=d49fb045\\_5](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/immunization/mi4a/ia2030_nis_guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=d49fb045_5)
- World Health Organization. UN Decade of Healthy Ageing: Plan of Action 2021–2030 [Internet]. [cited 2023Apr12]. Available from: [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/decade-of-healthy-ageing/decade-proposal-final-apr2020-en.pdf?sfvrsn=b4b75ebc\\_28](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/decade-of-healthy-ageing/decade-proposal-final-apr2020-en.pdf?sfvrsn=b4b75ebc_28)