

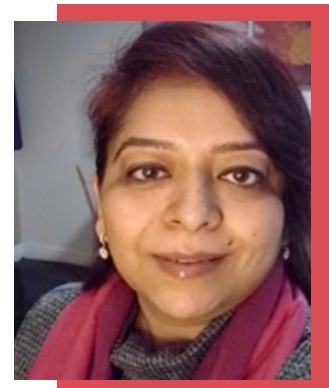
Building Global Momentum for Adult Vaccination Policy within COVID-19 Series:

Making COVID-19 a Springboard for Adult Vaccinations

Executive Summary



Dr. Michael Moore
Past-President
World Federation of Public Health
Associations (WFPHA)



Dr. Monika Arora
Chair
NCD Alliance India

08 June 2021

Context

Successful national immunization programmes depend on up-to-date policies and effective strategies in order to achieve and sustain their goals. While many national programmes are built on a life course approach from birth to end-of-life, at-risk populations frequently defined by older age and those with co-morbidities have until very recently received much less attention than the pediatric program. This is most starkly noted with the WHO influenza targets of 90% for children and 75% for older people¹. The reasons for the disparity could be grounded in a lack of data, or even the scientific debate on the effectiveness of vaccines in older age, the optics of inequality are evident.

The COVID-19 pandemic has without question exposed the brutal consequences of infectious diseases for the most at-risk populations which includes healthy older people as well as those with chronic conditions². The pandemic has also unearthed an uncomfortable structural and societal ageism affecting the human rights of millions of people around the world. From hospital triaging guidelines to chronic understaffing of long-term care facilities, national health systems did not take the necessary steps to ensure that vulnerable people had access to life-saving health services, regardless of age or socioeconomic background³.

Building Global Momentum for Adult Vaccination Policy within COVID-19, a four-part webinar series was developed to engage civil society in discussions to collectively inform post-pandemic policies on routine adult vaccinations (e.g., influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, pertussis) needed to recover and rebuild national health systems.

Executive Summary

Making COVID-19 a Springboard for Adult Vaccinations was the theme of the fourth and final dialogue with Dr Michael Moore, past president of the World Federation of Public Health Association (WFPHA), and Dr Monika Arora, Chair of Non-communicable disease (NCD) Alliance India who shared their perspectives on essential post-pandemic actions needed to guide future adult vaccination policy.

A powerful lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic was that good health plays a substantial role in economic growth. On average, countries allocate a small percentage of the overall healthcare budget for prevention and promotion (around 2%), with Canada leading the global standard at 5%⁴. The pandemic has revealed that economics and health are interrelated, when health systems are adversely impacted, economic consequences follow, likewise, when populations are healthy, there are economic benefits.

To best understand the relationship between economics and health is to view immunisation across the life course in terms of both the return on investment to society (i.e., the principles of productivity) and reduction in costs to health care and long-term care systems. A comprehensive immunisation program focusing on health for all, must also incorporate sound funded recommendations for routine adult vaccinations (e.g., influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, pertussis) to optimise social and economic dividend of a healthy ageing population. As the world moves forward, civil society must advocate for preventative policies such as routine adult vaccinations by highlighting to the government the importance of expenditure on prevention.

Dr Moore in his closing remarks called on governments to regulate and influence policy and programs which improve the health of the population. The opposition argument that such policies are overprotective and a breach of freedom detracts from the science that informs vaccination policies that save millions of lives every year.

Providing insights on issues faced by those living with noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and ways in which the pandemic has exacerbated their vulnerability, Dr Arora made the segue to present the case that older people and those with chronic medical conditions are at high risk for vaccine preventable diseases. Currently, NCDs represent 71% of all global deaths and constitute seven out of the ten deaths worldwide⁵. Despite the crippling mortality and morbidity statistics associated with people suffering from an NCD and furthermore being a major public health issue globally it is routinely underfunded. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) faced challenges of diagnosing individuals with NCDs, and this problem has increased due to the severe disruptions in health care systems including but not limited to a complete shut down of nonessential care.

Also, 'lockdowns' during the pandemic have resulted in an increase in risk factors for NCDs such as increased alcohol and tobacco use, decreased physical activity, and unhealthy diets placing current healthy populations at considerable risk for future disease conditions. Delays in the treatment and management of chronic conditions and increases in risk factors will inevitably result in a surge in demand for later stage NCD care, and an additional burden on health care systems which are commonly under pressure.

In the Indian landscape Dr Arora painted a stark picture of inequalities of citizens living in urban and rural areas. In rural areas those with NCDs experience barriers to treatment, often travelling long distances to larger cities which is further complicated and unsafe in today's climate of high COVID-19 infection rates.

Those with a chronic noncommunicable disease have raised real concerns about the limited and sometimes confusing messages on the COVID-19 vaccines and most particularly the safety for at-risk groups. For many, the pandemic is the first-time conversations about adult vaccination have occurred, highlighting existing gaps in policy for routine adult vaccinations. These gaps must be addressed, particularly for risk groups such as older people and those with NCDs since increased age and comorbidities can cause greater and more severe symptoms of vaccine preventable diseases.

There may never be a "post-pandemic era" and in reality, the world will need to adapt to the ongoing occurrence of COVID-19 much like other infectious diseases such as influenza. Therefore, it is critical to have discussions on how best to inform public health policy particularly for adult vaccinations which can help lower the strain on health care systems, but equally importantly lead to healthier populations. Multisectoral frameworks along with multistakeholder partnerships will be key in creating effective policies that address issues of disease prevention, treatment, and management for all populations, especially adults and those with NCDs.

Speakers

Dr Michael Moore
Past-President,
World Federation of Public Health
Associations (WFPHA)

Dr Michael Moore is the Past President of the World Federation of Public Health Associations and in 2018 retired as CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA). Dr Moore was also Australia's first independent Minister when he was appointed as Minister of Health and Community Care. In 2017 he was honoured by being made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

Dr Moore holds a post-graduate diploma in education, a master's degree in population health from the Australian National University (ANU), and a PhD from the University of Canberra examining effective public health advocacy. He is a Distinguished Fellow at The George Institute for Global Health, a Visiting Professor at the University of Technology Sydney, and an Adjunct Professor with the University of Canberra.

Dr Moore was the Public Health Association of Australia's Sidney Sax Medallist in 2018 and was made a Life Member in 2019. He is widely published, including over thirty peer review publications. Dr Moore is also a political and social columnist who has served on a range of academic and community Boards.

Dr. Monika Arora
Chair,
NCD Alliance India

Dr Monika Arora is the Director of the Health Promotion Division and professor at Public Health Foundation of India as well as Chair of NCD Alliance India. She is also the Executive Director of a Delhi based NGO: HRIDAY (Health Related Information Dissemination Amongst Youth) in India which serves as the secretariat of Healthy India Alliance

Dr. Arora holds a Ph.D. degree from the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, a master's degree in Child Development from Lady Irwin College, as well as a master's in Health Promotion from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Dr Arora's research and recommendations have informed many national health programmes in India.

Dr. Arora has been honored with the Best Practices Award in Global Health in 2011 for demonstrating best practice example in health promotion among youth and community, especially focusing on preventing NCDs. She has also been awarded with the WHO Director General's World No Tobacco Day Award in 2012, Dr. Prem Menon outstanding service award in January 2018 by World-India Diabetes Foundation (WIDF), and "Exceptional Women of Excellence 2018 Award" by Women Economic Forum (WEF) in April 2018.

Access the webinar recording on Youtube here: <https://bit.ly/3x4mSSN>

References

- 1 WHO. (2019). Table 1: Summary of WHO Position Papers - Recommendations for Routine Immunization. Retrieved online at: <https://bit.ly/2KNkrhw>
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
- 3 Nelson, R. (2020). COVID-19 disrupts vaccine delivery. The Lancet Infectious Diseases.
- 4 Gmeinder, M., Morgan, D. and Mueller, M. (2017) How much do OECD countries spend on prevention? OECD Working Papers, No. 101. Available at: <https://www.snop.it/attachments/article/775/OECD%20%20spese%20prevenzione.pdf>
- 5 World Health Organization. (n.d.). Non communicable diseases. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>.

International Federation on Ageing
1 Bridgepoint Drive, Suite G.238
Toronto, ON, M4M 2B5, Canada

www.vaccines4life.com

Published 08 Jun 2021 © Vaccines4Life

