

Press Release | Latest IFA report aims to strengthen the National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups

Toronto, September 2023 – The WHO Immunization Agenda 2030 (IA2030) and the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing are global visions and strategies endorsed by Member States to address specific challenges that impact the health and wellbeing of citizens across their life course over the next decade to provide strategic actions and guidelines for a life course approach to immunization and healthy ageing.

Comprehensive national immunization plans across the life course are informed by evidence-based recommendations from National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) made up of national experts in their fields. To better understand the degree to which the ‘life course approach’ is actualized in the IA2030 agenda and translated into the Decade, the International Federation on Ageing conducted a systemic review of NITAGs in thirty-four countries across WHO regions.

Using the WHO process indicators and the TAPIC Framework, the study [*Evidence to Action: A Review of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups*](#) aims to inform and strengthen the NITAG structure and function in support of a life course approach to immunization and healthy ageing.

This groundbreaking study highlighted the urgent need for stronger governance, and greater transparency in the nature of operational mechanisms, and recommendations. Almost three-quarters of NITAGs have a strong secretariat that supports meetings with necessary background documents, reports, and recommendations. Yet there were significant variations across NITAGs in terms of publically available information; for example, online availability of meeting minutes and meeting agendas was limited to 32% of countries.

A life course approach to immunization was not reflected in the NITAG composition in more than 80% of the countries studied with an over representation of members in the pediatric field. Only three countries (France, El Salvador, Canada) had experts in adult vaccination, geriatrics or the population ageing among their members.

About 50% of countries studied publicly reported that NITAG meetings included external experts such as consultants from the WHO, industry experts and specialists. However, considering the important role of civil society during the COVID-19 pandemic it was surprising to note that no countries involved this sector regardless of their expertise in ageing and immunizations.

Information on the processes and mechanisms used to inform and grade recommendations for their respective Ministries of Health was also not readily available in 10 countries.

[*Evidence to Action: A Review of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups \(NITAGs\)*](#) report illustrates the urgent need for good governance and accountability toward strengthening the role and trust of expert agencies making vaccine recommendations across the life course. Lessons learned from each NITAG, and overarching recommendations can be used as a guide in promoting practices to improve the effectiveness of NITAGs and, arguably, the population coverage of people of all ages.

The gaps in adult vaccination policies and programs in a life course approach mean that older people are being left behind, and NITAGs have a responsibility to take purposeful actions to include experts across all stages of life to meet the needs of older adults and support healthy ageing more broadly.

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About The International Federation on Ageing is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with a unique membership base comprising government, NGOs, academia, industry, and individuals in over 80 countries. Over the last 50 years, the IFA has become known as a leading and innovative organization that works across disciplines and sectors toward common goals that improve the lives of older people. The IFA has general consultative status at the United Nations and, as a non-State actor at the World Health Organization (WHO), is in a position to contribute to and inform intergovernmental dialogue while supporting civil society at a national and local level.