

16 April 2020

Dear G20 Health Ministers:

As the world continues to grapple with COVID-19, officials across the globe are scrambling to tackle the unprecedented health challenges as well as the resulting economic crisis stemming from this pandemic. The United Nations (UN) International Labour Organization projects that 5 to 25 million jobs will be eradicated because of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), and G20 leaders have already accounted spending of over USD \$5 trillion to counter the impacts of the pandemic. Furthermore, COVID-19 will disproportionately affect low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and stall progress on domestic resource mobilization for universal health coverage and health security.

At this critical juncture, the world is turning once more to the G20 for leadership. As G20 health and finance ministers meet this week under the presidency of Saudi Arabia, leaders must come together to craft a global response to the pandemic and take action, including addressing the needs of people living in the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries.

As part of a comprehensive global response to address emerging global health security challenges, support health systems, and mitigate further economic damage, we respectfully request that G20 leaders consider the following recommendations in building a resilient global health system that will significantly increase the world's ability to react to future health threats:

1. Reaffirm the World Health Organization (WHO)'s unique role in the global COVID-19 response:

- a) WHO is the only organization with the technical capacity and global mandate to support the global public health response during this critical time.
- b) Support WHO's COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, including coordinated resource mobilization to quell the pandemic

2. Invest in strengthening the resilience of health systems in their own countries and regionally, while accounting for displaced populations:

- a) Primary health care (PHC) is the most cost-effective and resilient approach to health service delivery and can help address outbreaks before they become pandemics. G20 member states should prioritize investments in PHC at the community level to build the resilience of the overall system and address future outbreaks.
- b) Commit to building strong health systems that are better able to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks, including by embracing and investing in the digitalization of health—including health workforce data—in support of International Health Regulations (IHR) commitments

- c) Commit to investing in critical components of health systems, including the workforce; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), particularly in healthcare facilities; testing supplies and laboratory networks; sex and age disaggregated data; digital infrastructure, supply chains, manufacturing capacities, and initiatives necessary to manage and ensure the availability and equitable allocation of essential health tools, equipment, and other supplies that are integral to prevention and response efforts

3. Invest in global platforms for health:

- a) Recognize the critical role of existing mechanisms such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (Gavi) in strengthening health systems, tackling drug-resistance, and preventing unnecessary deaths from infectious diseases, and commit to increasing G20 countries' contributions to both, including Gavi's replenishment this year
- b) Support calls for a new Global Health Security Challenge Fund that complements existing UN agency work in strengthening countries' long-term preparedness capacity

4. Invest in research and development for new tools:

- a) Commit to providing immediate resources to WHO and other multilateral bodies that are coordinating and investing in research and development, regulatory harmonization, and quality-assured manufacturing for new COVID-19 biomedical countermeasures
- b) Commit to investing in research and development for new technologies and adoption of proven digital tools to prevent, test, and treat COVID-19 as well as to protect health workers; new tools should be developed with research that is needs-driven, evidence-based, and guided by the principles of affordability, effectiveness and efficiency, and equity, and suited for delivery in low-resource settings with weaker health systems
- c) Invest in platform technologies that can be rapidly adapted to respond to immediate and future threats, and support initiatives aimed at speeding up research and de-risking the pathways for new and off-patent drugs and biologics as well as innovative solutions for diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, and medical devices and equipment, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators; invest in existing research and development efforts and infrastructure for tuberculosis (TB), HIV, malaria, and other diseases that can be and are likely to translate into advances in research and development for COVID-19
- d) Support the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation (CEPI) for vaccine development, the Therapeutics Accelerator for scale up of therapeutics, FIND in partnership with WHO to close the diagnostics gap and bolster surveillance, Grand Challenge models and product development partnerships to accelerate vaccine development, and the scale up of treatments to fight COVID-19
- e) Tools developed to respond to COVID-19 must be evaluated in both pediatric and elderly populations, with a gendered lens and for populations most at risk, including pregnant women and those who are already suffering from other diseases such as HIV, TB, malaria, and other chronic conditions.

5. Build health workforce capacity and protect frontline health workers:

- a) G20 countries should commit to investing in immediately addressing the global health workforce shortfall, which was projected by WHO before the COVID-19 pandemic to reach 18 million by 2030, mostly in LMICs. Investing in the health workforce is critical to building overall health system resilience to prevent and respond to outbreaks.
- b) Strengthen the frontline health workforce, including community health workers, by increasing IHR capacities to combat global threats, and increase contributions to capacity building measures for vulnerable populations
- c) Leaders should catalyze investment in women’s economic empowerment through health employment, with appropriate protection and benefits in underserved settings. Countries should explicitly recognize sexual and reproductive health services and information, including family planning, as essential services.
- d) The surge in medical demand has left frontline health workers at risk of infecting themselves and their patients, particularly community health workers in rural settings. Ensuring the procurement of PPE – gloves, medical masks, goggles, and face shields – for all health workers will enable them to prevent, detect, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to perform their day-to-day life-saving activities.

In conclusion, we urge G20 health leaders to adopt each of these recommendations and coordinate with finance ministers as well as G20 heads of state to take swift action to help the global health community quell the COVID-19 pandemic and restore the global economy.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Loyce Pace', with a large, stylized initial 'L' and 'P'.

Loyce Pace, MPH
President & Executive Director
Global Health Council