



Treatment Action Group

WHO Director-General's TB Vaccine Accelerator Council

Third High-Level Meeting of the Council
May 20, 2025

Statement delivered by civil society representative Mike Frick (Treatment Action Group)

- It's a privilege to provide a perspective from civil society on the TB Vaccine Accelerator Council's vision and priorities. I want to direct my remarks today to the third discussion question and voice my strong support for the establishment of working group 4 on *Country readiness, advocacy, and community partnerships*.
- Thanks to decades of purposive investments, science is closer than ever before to making the long-awaited dream of new TB vaccines a near possibility. But this scientific potential has arrived at a moment when the social contract through which vaccines become vaccinations and save lives has begun to fray.
- From my perspective in civil society, there are two fundamental challenges before us.
- The first is the anti-democratic retrenchment of spending on global health and specific attacks on vaccine research and development. The most dramatic example has been the evaporation of aid by the United States government, historically the largest contributor to global TB programs and to tuberculosis research and development and one of the largest sources of support for global immunization.
- The consequences are felt deeply by all stakeholders, but TB-affected communities have weathered and witnessed some of the worst disruptions. We hear every day from communities on the front lines of TB service delivery about shuttered clinics, empty drug stores, delayed diagnosis, patients without the medicines they need, organizations forced to close overnight.
- The protection new TB vaccines will offer is needed now more than ever, but the funding and community systems to deliver them is more uncertain than the last time we met here a year ago.
- This weakening of community-based platforms has increased the risk posed by the second problem, which is a turn toward vaccine denialism, sowing doubts about both new and established vaccines, and driven by a cynical anti-science movement hostile to the international cooperation this Council exemplifies.
- This anti-vaccine movement is agile, connected, and technologically savvy. It must be answered. To match and overcome it, it is imperative that we build a pro-science movement of community-based organizations and leaders who understand the science behind TB vaccines, have access to policy making spaces, and can coordinate across borders, from the grassroots to global stage.

- Against a wave of vaccine disinformation, we must build **infrastructures of trust**.
- TB vaccine science must be paired with social movements ready to receive and champion its benefits. This movement will be most successful if it is led by and for communities and connected to the important work of governments, multilateral organizations, funders, and vaccine developers.
- That's why I see the creation of a working group on *Country readiness, advocacy and community partnerships* as the right next step for the Accelerator Council.
- Toward this end, my organization, Treatment Action Group, recently surveyed TB civil society to assess their readiness to engage in new TB vaccine policymaking. Over 125 organizations from all over the world responded to the survey, the results of which we're still analyzing. But already several things are clear:
 - First, across civil society, there's a lot of hope for transformative collaborations, for example, between National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups and civil society in strengthening and complementing each other's capacities to improve vaccine evaluation and introduction.
 - Second, there is a clear call for more fora and opportunities for information exchange and dialogue toward informed advocacy to support TB vaccine development and implementation. Many groups have experience working on TB prevention but are newer to immunization work and need information on the pipeline, policy making processes, and regulatory considerations.
 - Third, there is a unique potential to leverage established community-based systems for TB and HIV to build demand for TB vaccines.
- In the face of constrained resources, we cannot afford to underestimate the importance of fostering the community partnerships behind the key drivers of vaccine demand: trust building, evidence-based advocacy, equitable access. These activities should be prioritized, funded, and coordinated. I am confident that if the Accelerator Council creates the opportunity, TB civil society will answer the call.