

Template Terms of Reference for a vaccine communication working group



How to use this document

This document outlines a suggested structure and proposed contents of a Terms of Reference (TOR) for a national vaccine communication working group. Example texts for each of these elements are also provided for inspiration.

Establishing a national vaccine communication working group allows you to build strong working and collaboration relations with your allies, strengthen routine communication for immunization and ensure well-coordinated and immediate response from all involved authorities to any safety event.

Use the document as a starting point for discussions and for inspiration when developing a TOR for your working group.



How was this document developed?

This document is part of a WHO series of supporting documents concerning events that could erode confidence in vaccination. Such events can be related to vaccine safety, adverse events following immunization, changes in the vaccination programme, negative public debate, outbreaks or pandemics.

All documents were developed based on scientific evidence, laboratory research and fieldwork within psychology, social and behavioural science and communication and lessons learnt in countries. For an introduction to the theoretical background and evidence, refer to the WHO publication *Vaccination and trust*, available here: www.euro.who.int/vaccinetrust.

The supporting documents are intended for use by national

- ministries of health
- centers for disease control
- immunization programmes
- regulatory authority institutions.



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Establishing a vaccine communication working group with representatives from all national authorities involved in planning, coordinating, implementing and monitoring vaccine communication activities serves several purposes.

Strengthening routine communication for immunization.

Builds population resilience against vaccine scares

Building an understanding of each other's areas of work.

Facilitates better utilization of each other's strengths

Establishing strong working and collaboration relations between stakeholders before any crisis occurs.

Facilitates collaboration during crisis.

Ensuring well-coordinated and immediate response from all involved authorities to any safety event.

Prevents the situation from developing into a crisis or mitigates its negative impact.

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Suggested elements in Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for a national vaccine communication working group may include the following elements.



Background



Vision



Objectives



Functions



Functions in case of a vaccine safety-related event or crisis



Membership



Structure



Operating procedures



Chair:
Terms of Reference



Secretariat:
Terms of Reference

The following pages show example texts for the suggested elements in the Terms of Reference



Background

Example text

On 1-2 February 2016 immunization partners met at the Ministry of Health. The objectives of the meeting were to identify national vaccination programme threats and opportunities and to gauge what communication actions were necessary in addressing them. The meeting was attended by representatives of leading authorities in immunization activities in [the country], including key decision-makers at the Ministry of Health, the National Institute of Public Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Health Board, the State Agency of Medicines, the Health Insurance Fund, the Society of Infectious Diseases and the Society of Family Doctors. During the course of the meeting partners exchanged opinions on where their strengths and weaknesses were in terms of immunization advocacy and communication capacity and coordination.

Meeting participants agreed that internal communication and communication coordination is a prerequisite step in order to strengthen immunization advocacy and communication and to be prepared for any eventual vaccine safety-related event. There was consensus that a **vaccine communication working group** should be set up. It was noted that the highest priority should be placed on outbreak and vaccine safety event communication response capacity, readiness and preparedness.

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Vision

Example text

Efficient, coordinated implementation of effective vaccine communication strategies and activities by public health authorities in [the country], resulting in timely and appropriate response to vaccine safety-related issues and ensuring optimal immunization coverage in [the country].

Objectives

Example text

To achieve its vision, the working group has the following objectives:

- Equip national and sub-national public health authorities, healthcare associations and professionals with the tools, approaches and coordinated effort necessary to drive demand for vaccines, address anti-vaccination sentiment and respond to vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, vaccine safety scares or vaccine safety-related events (crisis communication).
- Serve as an advisory group on immunization advocacy and communication related issues, topics and actions – both as a proactive advisory body and as a reactive advisory body.
- Strengthen national capacity and ability to plan and implement strategic and tailored communication activities, frame and pre-test messages and materials and utilize media and interpersonal channels to respond rapidly and effectively to safety concerns, disease outbreaks and to optimize coverage.

Functions

Example text

The working group serves as a platform for sharing and coordinating activities and for ensuring effective and coordinated response in case of a vaccine safety-related event. To achieve this, the working group has the following functions.

- Serve as a network of vaccine communication partners in [the country].
- Coordinate media activities, responses and messages in relation to immunization, in particular in relation to any vaccine safety-related issues.
- Collaborate in response to any vaccine safety-related event according to agreed roles and responsibilities, sharing all information and coordinating activities.
- Jointly review and monitor public opinion and concerns, media and healthcare worker attitudes and opinions regarding vaccination.
- Regularly review and provide feedback on the communication activities and initiatives of each of the working group members.
- Review and, if relevant, adapt vaccine communication tools and guidance from partners, international organizations or other countries.
- Advise decision-makers about vaccine communication challenges and recommend solutions or activities to be conducted in addressing these.
- Ensure capacity building for vaccine communication.
- Post joint statements and advisories and plan joint European Immunization Week activities and similar advocacy campaigns or initiatives.
- Work alongside and collaborate with NGOs, civil society organizations and healthcare associations as and when deemed necessary by the group members.

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Functions in case of a vaccine safety-related event or crisis

Example text

The vaccine communication working group plays a critical role in responding to vaccine safety-related events – such as a serious adverse event following immunization (real or perceived), a vaccine recall or replacement, a new critical study. The event can be reported through the official reporting system or through media, social media, a rumour or elsewhere. When a vaccine safety event is reported, time is an issue. An efficient, rapid and well-coordinated response can prevent the event from developing into a crisis.

In the case of a vaccine safety crisis, the functions of the working group are to:

- **Immediately hold an extraordinary meeting**, preferably on the same day as the report of a safety-event, in order to:
 - discuss and agree on the potential impact of the event on trust in vaccines and immunization authorities
 - based on this, agree on a plan for the communication response, including immediate media and public information activities
 - agree on key messages
 - appoint a spokesperson which all group members will refer to if approached by the media, and ensure spokesperson training of this person. If the response requires two agencies to speak (e.g., Ministry of Health about health and well-being of the affected population and the Drug Administration agency about manufacturing, approval and licensing of a vaccine) ensure that the message boundaries are predetermined, clear with the spokespeople and agencies.
 - agree on the roles and responsibilities of all working group members in the response to the vaccine safety event, including how information is exchanged, who coordinates and liaises with investigators and other key stakeholders, and how this is done;
 - agree on a list of stakeholders that need to be kept informed and agree on roles and responsibilities of working group members in liaising with these stakeholders (i.e.,

stakeholders who may be approached by media or public and therefore need to know and understand the facts and messages that relate to the vaccine safety event)

- agree on the timing of the next working group meeting;
- Meet regularly until the issue has been settled, to share information and coordinate response;
- Continuously, throughout the process and following the events, share all necessary information with all group members concerning the safety-related event that come to their knowledge (face-to-face or via email), including any enquiries from the media, rumours, misperceptions spread via social media etc.;
- Draw on partners, experts and vaccine champions for advice and for support and assistance in spreading messages and curtailing misperceptions and rumours.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *How to ensure a context-specific response to events that may erode trust in vaccination*
- *Four immediate steps when responding to an event that may erode trust*
- *Crisis communications plan template*
- *How to prepare a press release*
- *How to monitor public opinion*
- *How to prepare a message map*
- *Myths and facts about immunization*
- *Vaccine safety messages*
- *Strategies used by journalists*
- *The questions journalists always ask in a crisis*
- *How to respond to concerns about immunization*
- *Stakeholder management*

euro.who.int/vaccinetrust

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Membership

Example text

Membership is limited to authorities directly involved in planning, coordinating, implementing and/or monitoring and evaluating vaccine communication activities in [the country].

Membership is not personal – each member represents an institution. Each institution can be represented by more than one representatives. **Senior level decision-makers within health, immunization and crisis response as well as senior level communication experts should, at all times, be represented in the working group.** The following institutions are represented in the group: Ministry of Health, the National Institute of Public Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the National Regulatory Authorities, the Institute of Public Information, the Health Board, the State Agency of Medicines, the Health Insurance Fund, the Society of Infectious Diseases and the Society of Family Doctors.

There are no term limits for working group members; however, a review of membership happens every two years to ensure membership is up-to-date and representative. The Ministry of Health is responsible for appointing new members and chairing any review of membership.

Although member institutions are not required to provide technical or financial support for working group activities, all members should seek opportunities to do so – particularly with regard to capacity building and ensuring that members are updated on the most recent vaccine communication developments and initiatives internationally.

Temporary members or invited resource persons

According to the topic of the working group meeting, be it an extraordinary meeting in response to a crisis or for planning activities, the working group will occasionally invite guest speakers and experts from outside the core group to attend and advise the group on appropriate action or review working group plans. Private sector representation, however, is not allowed on the working group.



Structure

Example text

The **Secretariat** of the working group is held by the Ministry of Health and is responsible for determining meeting venues and gathering consensus from members on meeting dates, as well as for the administrative support required during meetings (face-to-face and online).



Operating procedures

Example text

Each year, with input from the working group members, the Secretariat develops an annual programme of the working group work and agenda items for the upcoming year. The Secretariat monitors the plan and quarterly provides an update on working group activities to the group members (by email), alongside the most recent meeting report/minutes.

The working group meets at least twice a year. Other ad hoc meetings are held as needed and decided by the members of the working group – e.g. in relation to a vaccine safety-related event. Members are expected to communicate on an ongoing basis, or when the situation requires, either in face-to-face meetings or via email or telephone.

All members of the working group are advocates for the working group and participate in the mobilization of resources for the functioning of the group.

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Chair: terms of reference

Example text

A Chairperson is selected by the working group on an annual basis. The Chair does not have to be rotated and can serve for as long as the members of the working group determine. The Chair:

- leads the strategic direction of the working group;
- endorses and assumes responsibility with the Secretariat to ensure effective implementation of the working group workplan/schedule;
- convenes the working group meetings and endorses meeting agendas and reports;
- fosters coordination, interaction and exchange among all the working group members;
- represents the views of the working group in other meetings related to vaccines and communication;
- reports to the directorate of the Ministry of Health as appropriate on the working group outcomes and recommendations and any other relevant issues.



Secretariat: terms of reference

Example text

The Secretariat is hosted by the Ministry of Health, and works in close collaboration with and follows guidance from the group member institutions. Initiatives for action can come from either the group members or the secretariat, but should always include the other. The role and functions of the secretariat are defined as follows:

- Organizing the meetings of the working group;
- Preparing the agenda and relevant documents for these meetings (decided in-part by the previous the working group meeting minutes);
- Electing a rapporteur and distributing meeting reports;
- Monitoring and facilitating the implementation of the working group programme;
- Updating membership information (addresses, contacts etc.);
- Assuring that the working group functions in an accountable and transparent manner;
- Translating input of the working group members into other documents and initiatives;
- Continuously promoting engagement of members.

Example text has been adopted from the Terms of Reference of the Vaccine Communication Working Group in Estonia. Some elements have been altered.