

# How to prepare messages for decision-makers

This document is intended to support immunization programme managers and staff in their efforts to secure sustainable funding for immunization.

## **HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT**

Before approaching any decision-maker or influencer, take your time to develop key messages. Well-prepared messages will help you be precise in a complicated area, manage difficult questions and feel more confident.

You need to focus on the specific issues that resonate with the stakeholder you are approaching and

to take into account the motivators and barriers that may affect the stakeholder.

This document presents some guidance on what to take into account when developing messages. As inspiration, it also presents some potential motivators and barriers as well as some suggested messages.

**You can use the document as inspiration when developing your own messages.**

**Be aware that you will need to tailor the messages to your national setting and context and to the stakeholder you are approaching.**



# How to prepare messages for decision-makers

Before approaching any decision-maker or influencer, take your time to develop key messages. Know them well, and focus on them when you speak or write to the stakeholder. Well-prepared messages will help you...

- ... be precise in a complicated area
- ... keep focus when under pressure
- ... be consistent and repeat key messages
- ... manage difficult questions and challenges
- ... feel more confident – and thereby convincing!

## Understand stakeholders well

There are many reasons why immunization should be prioritized. You need to select and focus on the specific reasons that resonate with the person you are approaching. Use your knowledge of the stakeholder to understand their:

- **motivators:** the factors that would motivate the person to prioritize immunization;
- **barriers:** possible reasons why the person may not prioritize immunization.

## Create ownership

Find ways to ensure the stakeholder's ownership to immunization. Ask yourself:

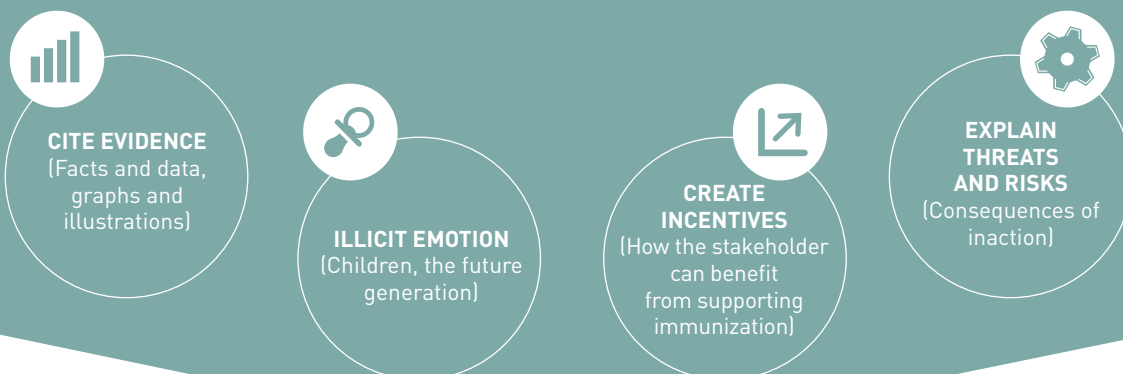
- How can he/she benefit from supporting immunization?
- How can I present immunization in a way that strengthens the stakeholder's work and supports his/her political standpoint?

## Share the messages

Messages are more powerful when carried by more than one person. Make sure that your colleagues and allies know the messages very well. If you do not convey the same messages, you will create confusion rather than trust and support.

## Use both facts oriented and emotional messages

How you interact with stakeholders depends on you, the stakeholder, the circumstances and the cultural and structural settings. However, consider the following communication techniques.



Below is a list of suggested messages, developed as inspiration for national immunization programmes. The messages are key messages that need to be substantiated with facts, data and supporting messages. They will also need to be adjusted to the national setting.

## ENABLERS

(WHY THEY WOULD

PRIORITIZE IMMUNIZATION)

## POSSIBLE MESSAGES

The failure of the immunization programme – outbreaks, low coverage – would fall back on them

- Declining immunization rates can cause increasing mortality, disability and disease rates.
- In case of an outbreak you might be blamed for inaction.

They would like to be associated with a success

- Immunization has been – and continues to be – a great success, if we just prioritize it.
- With continued investment in new vaccines, combination vaccines and a stronger immunization system we can prevent suffering and death caused by cervical cancer, meningitis and acute diarrhoea in small children, and we can reach those that are not yet protected.
- Imagine that within reach we have the incredible goals of eradicating polio globally and eliminating measles and rubella in our region.

They are concerned with global and regional goals which your country is obliged to live up to

- Imagine that within reach we have the incredible goals of eradicating polio globally and eliminating measles and rubella in our region.
- We can only reach these goals if we follow the global and regional guidelines.
- We have committed ourselves to reaching regional and global goals.

They are concerned with your country's international reputation

- Outbreaks of preventable diseases affect how the world perceives us – e.g. their perception of the risks of travelling to our country and their view on how well our public systems and structures are managed.

They are concerned with human rights issues, Sustainable Development Goals and/or poverty reduction goals

- Immunization is a basic right for every human being.
- Immunization is an important element in reaching the Sustainable Development Goal 3.8: "Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all".

They are concerned with child health or general health issues

- Immunization represents significant socioeconomic returns – e.g. as regards, poverty reduction, equity and education.
- Anyone who cares about children should care about immunization.
- Anyone who cares about the well-being of their population should care about immunization.

## TIP

For more guidance on understanding stakeholders and justifying investment, refer to steps 3 and 4 of the WHO publication "Advocacy workbook. Mobilizing resources for immunization" available here: [www.euro.who.int/immunization-advocacy-library](http://www.euro.who.int/immunization-advocacy-library).

For inspiration, data and supporting messages, refer to the documents in the WHO immunization advocacy library: [www.euro.who.int/immunization-advocacy-library](http://www.euro.who.int/immunization-advocacy-library).

## BARRIERS

(WHY THEY WOULD NOT PRIORITIZE IMMUNIZATION)

National budgets are under pressure

- Immunization has proven to be one of the world's most cost-effective public health investments.
- If you strengthen immunization, you strengthen the health system as a whole – reaching more children and more people with more skilled health care workers and with stronger services.

Other (health) priorities are more important to them

- Declining immunization coverage can cause increasing mortality, disability and disease rates.
- Even if national immunization coverage is high, disease outbreaks may very well occur in specific geographic locations or with specific groups in the country (specify which in your national setting).

They do not feel any commitment as regards immunization

- Only if we – together with other countries – live up to the agreed goals can we eliminate diseases which cause suffering, disability and death.

They believe that immunization is just providing vaccines – and do not understand the need to ensure that all elements of the programme are strong and well-functioning

- Ensuring population immunity against vaccine-preventable diseases is a complex process that requires continued investment. Any weak link can jeopardize the success of the immunization programme.
- We need to invest in tailored strategies to reach every person; staff training and capacity building; organization, planning and supervision; monitoring, surveillance and response systems; supply chain systems; and cold chain, storage and handling systems.

They understand the need, but they (always) want to postpone till next year

- For each year of complacency, failing to invest in immunization, the risk of an outbreak increases.

They are concerned about vaccine safety

- Vaccines are safe, and the benefits of vaccination greatly outweigh the many, many more injuries and deaths that would occur without vaccines.
- Vaccine safety is highly regulated, including a range of functions that cover the entire process from vaccine development through licensure to use.

They do not know or understand the value of immunization

- Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases are becoming more frequent in our region.
- Even with high coverage, we still have groups of under- or unimmunized people, so an outbreak in our country is indeed a risk.
- Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases may cause death, disability and suffering.

They are affected by vaccination opponents in your country

- Vaccines are some of the safest medical products available.
- Vaccines are the best defence we have against serious, sometimes deadly diseases.
- (Other messages tailored to the prevalent myths).

They feel confident because the national immunization rates are high

- Even if national immunization coverage is high, disease outbreaks may very well occur in specific geographic locations or with specific groups in the country (specify which in your national setting).
- Countries with high national coverage have experienced measles outbreaks in recent years – such as Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.