

Ensuring Australia increases its contribution to child immunisation

SUMMARY: *Each year, nearly two million children die from vaccine-preventable diseases. Pneumonia and diarrhoea account for 40% of these deaths. The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) aims to reduce these deaths significantly by ensuring current vaccines are available to nearly all children, as well as introducing new or little-used vaccines. Over the last 10 years, GAVI has supported programs that have saved an estimated 5 million lives, and over the next five years GAVI aims to scale up immunisation to save a further 4 million lives. The estimated cost of saving these lives is \$US 6.8 billion (\$A 6.5 billion), and Australia's fair share is \$A 165 million. However, Australia can play a leading role in vaccinating children by contributing \$250 million. This month we will write to Members of Parliament, asking the Australian Government to commit to playing a leading role at the pledging conference for immunisation in June 2011.*

"The evidence is clear: vaccines are the best public health investment we can make. But despite this evidence...we struggle to find the resources to invest in vaccines." Dr Rajiv Shah, Administrator of USAID, February 2011.

CHILD DEATH RATES AND IMMUNISATION

One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to reduce the mortality rate for children under 5 by two thirds between 1990 and 2015. Many countries have made significant progress in reducing child mortality, and the global child mortality rate has fallen from 90 deaths per 1,000 births in 1990 to 65 per 1,000 births in 2008.

Widespread immunisation of children has contributed significantly to this reduced death rate. Each year, immunisation saves the lives of 2.5 million children under the age 5. It has been particularly effective in reducing measles deaths, which have declined from 733,000 in 2000 to 164,000 in 2008 (a 78% reduction!).¹ However, immunisation rates are still uneven both within and between countries – for example, 23.5 million children missed out on the combined diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine in 2008.

The Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) was launched in 2000 with the objectives of saving children's lives and protecting health, through increasing immunisation in the poorest countries. GAVI brings together resources and expertise from key organisations in immunisation, including UNICEF, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank.

Over the last 10 years, GAVI's support for increased immunisation has avoided an estimated five million future deaths, using \$US 4 billion in donor funding.

FUTURE FUNDING AND AUSTRALIA'S SHARE

¹ UNICEF, *Progress for Children* 2010, page 24.

For the period 2011 to 2015, GAVI is seeking a total of \$US 6.8 billion (\$A 6.5 billion), of which \$US 3.1 billion is already committed. Therefore, GAVI is seeking commitments to new funding of \$US 3.7 billion (\$A 3.6 billion) at the pledging conference on immunisation with the theme “Saving Children’s Lives” in June 2011.

The requested funding will enable 243 million children to receive immunisation against hepatitis B, yellow fever, pneumococcal disease and rotavirus, and support introduction of vaccines against, cervical cancer, meningitis, rubella and typhoid. The expected impact of these additional immunisations is to avoid 3.9 million future deaths.

Australia’s share of the \$6.5 billion in additional funding over five years would be at least \$165 million, based on Australia contributing 2.5% of the total, consistent with its share of total aid in recent years. The pledge of \$33 million per year would incorporate Australia’s current contribution to GAVI, which is \$20 million per year from 2011 to 2013.

(AMENDMENT)

However, the expected strong growth in Australia’s aid in the next four years gives Australia a responsibility and opportunity to take a leading role at the pledging conference. Playing a leading role would involve increasing Australia’s contribution to \$250 million (\$50 million per year). As the Australian Government has committed to increase aid to 0.5% of gross national income by 2015-16 (nearly doubling the dollar amount of Australian aid) over the next five years, this higher pledge would be easily affordable.

HAVING MPs SUPPORT INCREASED GAVI CONTRIBUTIONS

With the pledging conference, Saving Children’s Lives, taking place on 13 June 2011, it is essential for the Australian Government to make a decision on its future GAVI contributions within the next week. Therefore, it is timely to ask Members of Parliament to write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, calling on the Government to announce an increase in its commitment to GAVI at the pledging conference in June, and for RESULTS members and partner organisations to write directly to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. It would also be appropriate to ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs to attend the pledging conference (which he is considering).

ACTION:

Write to your Member of the House of Representatives or a Senator from your State, and ask your Member or Senator to take the following actions:

- Write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Kevin Rudd MP, calling on the Government to commit to contributing up to \$250 million over 5 years to GAVI at the pledging conference in June 2011, and asking him to attend the conference.
- Raise the following key points in writing to the Minister for Foreign Affairs:
 - Note the impact of GAVI’s programs over the last 10 years, including saving an estimated 5 million lives.
 - Note that GAVI is seeking a total of \$6.5 billion over the next 5 years to save a further 4 million lives.
 - Call on the Australian Government to commit at least its fair share of the \$6.5 billion (\$165 million), and preferably commit to a leading role by contributing \$250 million, at the June pledging conference.
- You can also make these points to the Minister for Foreign Affairs directly.

See also: www.gavialliance.org

www.gavialliance.org/resources/GAVI_Evidence_Base_2010_2.pdf