

Call To Action

Statement of the High-Level Panel on Vaccine Confidence & Misinformation

Co-Chairs

Heidi J. Larson & J. Stephen Morrison

Project Director

Katherine E. Bliss

About the Panel

In July 2020, the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Global Health Policy Center and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine's Vaccine Confidence Project™ convened a high-level panel of experts to consider the urgent challenges of vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, and U.S. national security. In October 2020, the panel issued a Call to Action to address these issues in the context of the Covid-19 crisis.

The high-level panel is co-chaired by J. Stephen Morrison, Senior Vice President and Director of the CSIS Global Health Policy Center, and Heidi J. Larson, Professor of Anthropology, Risk, and Decision Science and Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project™ at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The panel's work is supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the foundation.

The United States' health crisis continues unabated, amid profound uncertainty. As of November 11, 2020, confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the United States exceed **10 million**, while deaths exceed 240,000. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) **forecasts** a surge that will result in nearly 400,000 deaths by February 1, 2021.

Covid-19 has triggered multiple compounding crises that threaten the national security of the United States, including severe economic dislocations, an intensified housing crisis, disrupted schooling, deepening political polarization, and aggravated social and racial tensions. Hope rests on the promise of a Covid-19 vaccine(s) in early 2021 and improvements in therapies and testing technologies, combined with continued vigilance to prevent the spread of the virus through the use of masks, handwashing, and social distancing.

Yet the United States' hope of escaping Covid-19 is at grave risk, with implications for U.S. stability and national security. Today, the successful introduction of safe and effective vaccines to prevent infection with Covid-19 is increasingly in doubt, given the precipitous decline in public trust and confidence in science, health authorities, vaccines, Washington, D.C., and the polluted mainstream and digital media environments.

Polls conducted in early September 2020 show that just slightly more than **half** of respondents say they would be willing to get a Covid-19 vaccine, with numbers over the past four months dropping for all demographic groups. **62 percent** of people are worried that political pressure will rush through a premature vaccine approval.

Many have stepped forward in September and October to boost public confidence and trust—including **Moncef Slaoui**, head of the U.S. government's Operation Warp Speed vaccine development initiative,

The High-Level Panel recommends



THE RAPID LAUNCH OF AN INDEPENDENT PANEL ON VACCINES AND MISINFORMATION

to assess the decline in popular trust in science and recommend concrete measures to be taken at the national, state, and local levels.



INNOVATIONS IN REACHING DIVERSE AND UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS WITH VACCINES AND OTHER HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES SUPPORT

by integrating the delivery of Covid-19 vaccines into a broader platform of services.



PLEDGES AND ACTIONS BY MAINSTREAM AND DIGITAL MEDIA

to proactively stop the spread of mis- and disinformation, collaborating with health providers to amplify scientific content.



GREATER ACTIVISM BY KEY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SECTORS, the U.S. military, and iconic cultural figures, marshalling

their bipartisan influence to initiate a national dialogue, and empower people to make informed choices about vaccines for themselves and their families.



FEDERAL REFORM

including interagency leadership at the National Security Council, a strategic CDC communications initiative, and increased U.S. support for and coordination with global immunization partners.

and the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#)—pledging to prevent the coronavirus vaccine review from being rushed or politicized. Former [federal officials](#) have also stepped forward to share their trust in the integrity of the scientific process, while warning against even the appearance of politicization.

Nine vaccine manufacturers took the unprecedented step of issuing a “[safety pledge](#)” to emphasize the importance of rigorous regulatory standards, and [individual companies](#) have released coronavirus vaccine trial details to promote greater transparency regarding how they assess products’ safety and efficacy.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s [Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine](#) recommends that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) create and fund a Covid-19 vaccination risk communication and community engagement program. And social media companies including [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) have taken steps to take down harmful information and limit ads and videos that discourage vaccination.

Congress has also taken initiative, building on previously introduced [legislation](#) on vaccine confidence by proposing a new [task force](#) to coordinate the government’s response to misinformation about the pandemic.

But additional steps are still urgently needed—now.

More is needed to redress the decline in popular trust and confidence and the dissemination of mis- and disinformation related to Covid-19 vaccines.

The current crisis calls for a strategic, bipartisan approach focused on rapid and responsive communications to address public questions and concerns, leveraging digital media platforms to mitigate the amplification of risk and interrupt the spread of harmful mis- and disinformation. It also calls for accelerated efforts to ensure the effective, equitable delivery of vaccines, along with other services, that support communities in moving beyond the pandemic.

To read the full Call to Action and recommendations, visit <http://cs.is/calltoaction>.

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