

# **Pandemic Accord: An opportunity to advance political commitment to antimicrobial resistance (AMR)**

## **Summary**

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### **Introduction**

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), often referred to as a "silent pandemic", is one of the top ten global public health threats according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Its global burden is estimated at approximately 4.95 million deaths, of which 1.27 million are directly attributable to AMR. The pandemic accord negotiations initiated by WHO member states represent a key opportunity to ensure a global coherent and unified response to AMR – a challenge that cannot be met by improving only global preparedness and response mechanisms but whose prevention requires comprehensive global coordination across human, animal, and environmental health. Thus, a pandemic instrument seems to be a unique opportunity to address the spread of one of the greatest global health challenges of our time with cross-sector cooperation and knowledge sharing.

### **Purpose of a pandemic accord**

In light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in December 2021 WHO member states initiated a process to develop and negotiate a new convention, agreement, or other international instrument on pandemic preparedness and response. This was to ensure that communities, governments, and all sectors of society will be better prepared and protected to prevent and respond to future pandemics. One of the key elements of the proposed agreement is the aim to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources and health care required for pandemic prevention.

Hence, a pandemic agreement could be beneficial to improve the global cooperative framework for pandemic risk monitoring, alert, response, and implementation of pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response measures. Moreover, it could strengthen a collective research and development (R&D) system and ensure global equitable access. According to public health experts and advocates, it is critical to include One Health as an overarching principle in order to benefit from its transversal impact on preventing disease outbreaks and reducing antibiotic-resistant infections.

However, the ongoing discussions translate how different the expectations and approaches of WHO's 194 countries are with regard to the legal form and scope of the pandemic accord. In this respect, it remains unclear how and to what extent AMR will be addressed. So far, the provisions on AMR have increased since the first Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB)

working draft (3 in the initial working draft, 7 in the Conceptual Zero Draft and 10 in the current Zero Draft), which is a positive sign. Page 2/3

### **Why should AMR be addressed in a pandemic accord?**

The current negotiations on a pandemic accord provide a distinctive opportunity to address some of the global challenges through AMR. Addressing the causes and impacts of AMR poses significant challenges to both individual countries and the international community. While some aspects of antimicrobial resistance, such as prevention, monitoring, response, control and management of AMR, are already addressed in existing regulations, a pandemic accord provides an opportunity to fill gaps, ensure appropriate global coordination and cross-national communication. National and global implementation of the One Health approach are already paving the way for integrated strategies to reduce antibiotic use and combat AMR. Many of the measures that may be included in a pandemic tool, including investments in surveillance, infection prevention measures, manufacturing capacity, data generation and sharing, health worker training, and joint procurement, are likely to have a positive impact on pandemic prevention, preparedness as well as AMR response and control.

Combating AMR is a condition sine qua non for positive developments not only in terms of human health, but also for animal health, food production, and the global economy. Public, private and non-profit sectors should jointly invest in R&D, but also production capacities for drugs and diagnostics, before and during crises.

Addressing antibiotic resistance is also important in strengthening health systems and achieving universal health coverage. If bacterial infections cannot be treated, good quality healthcare cannot be provided, which in turn jeopardizes the sustainable financing of universal healthcare.

### **Why should decision-makers and civil society care, and how can they impact the process?**

Following the inequities experienced in the COVID-19 vaccine distribution process, in view of restoring trust and engagement in public health institutions, it is important to ensure a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach with relevant stakeholders comprehensively, including decision-makers, civil society and local communities. Good governance and sustained political leadership are key ingredients for a successful accord. Governments are also in agreement of the fact that they cannot repeat the mistakes of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

As WHO has set an ambitious timeline to conclude negotiations on the pandemic accord, foreseen in May 2024, now is the time for stakeholders to understand thoroughly the content and dynamic of the new pandemic instrument, in order to seize the opportunity and contribute effectively to shaping the accord. While WHO member states are working on the so-called Zero-Draft which was published on February 1, 2023, health experts and non-governmental organizations had a few possibilities to engage within the framework given by the INB. After examining countries' written proposals, the Drafting Group of the INB will meet in June 2023 to continue negotiations. Acceptance of health negotiations and decision-making will be particularly enhanced if the process is accountable, transparent, equitable, inclusive,

participatory, and consistent with the rule of law. Consequently, the negotiations of the pandemic accord should follow these principles. In this respect, the active engagement of national parliaments is key as they are powerful democratic institutions that can play a critical role in conveying clear messages and helping to restore dialogue and trust with citizens.

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### **Policy recommendations: Holistic and systematic response to the threat of AMR**

AMR should be included in the pandemic accord, either in the body of the text or in a more detailed protocol. This is not to miss the opportunity to jointly address at the same time the key issues of climate change and AMR arising from human impact, but also to increase the much-needed lack of awareness and funding to AMR. National AMR action plans can thus also be reinforced and leveraged. Therefore, the following policy recommendations can be made:

- › Recognize and urgently address the global threat of drug-resistant infections, including all microbes with pandemic potential, including bacteria.
- › Make affordable access to existing and new antimicrobials, vaccines, and diagnostics a global priority, taking into account the needs of all countries.
- › Improve awareness and understanding of AMR issues, viewing antibiotic efficacy as a global public good, central to pandemic preparedness and response.
- › Embed the One Health approach at the core of the pandemic contract, involving multiple stakeholders and sectors at all stages of policy development.
- › Establish an accountable, transparent, equitable, inclusive, participatory, and consistent decision-making process, with clear accountability monitoring mechanisms and adequate resources for implementation, particularly for LMICs.
- › Ensure that low- and middle-income countries are equal partners in a comprehensive global response, with an R&D readiness and response agenda at the global level.
- › Promote responsible use of antimicrobials at the national level to maintain the effectiveness of existing antimicrobials while ensuring equitable access, aligning all relevant ongoing initiatives to maximize synergies, outcomes, consistency, and coherence.

### **Conclusion**

The pandemic accord represents a major opportunity to raise awareness and commitment in dealing with AMR. However, it cannot meet all the challenges in the context of AMR. To successfully tackle drug-resistant infections in the long term, it will also require actions at national level and further cooperation, not only in emergency, but tackled proactively. Other activities in the pandemic preparedness and response infrastructure, as the Financial Intermediary Fund for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response as well as national-regional-level PPR mechanisms should be consistently aligned. To address global health and climate challenges sustainably, policymakers and civil society must strengthen national ownership through effective governance, accountability, global solidarity and transparency mechanisms.