



Press statement

World Medical Association, German Medical Association and Pontifical Academy for Life collaborate to promote vaccine equity and confront vaccine hesitancy

Millions around the world are still suffering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination is widely seen as a fast and effective way to control the spread of the virus and save human lives. Much as the current pandemic has brought home the importance of vaccination, it has also laid bare the great inequity of access to vaccines and the dangers posed by vaccine nationalism. While many higher-income countries had the resources to quickly sign bilateral agreements with pharmaceutical companies for promising COVID-19 vaccine candidates, this left many developing countries at a disadvantage due to financial restrictions and limitations on production capacity.

Vaccine accessibility still poses great challenges in many parts of the world, but there are also countries where vaccines are readily available but subject to skepticism and mistrust. Vaccine hesitancy is a complex issue. Some reluctance in disadvantaged communities is rooted in historical inequities, breaches of trust in medical research, negative experiences with health care and suspicion about pharmaceutical companies' behavior focused on profit. But a more pernicious form of vaccine hesitancy is driven by unfounded and misleading claims and myths, including disinformation about side effects, which are amplified by social media and other means of enhanced communication. Adding to this complexity is the fact that vaccine hesitancy even exists in the medical community and some religious groups. Vaccine hesitancy and refusal can ultimately give rise to difficult ethical questions about the tension between individual freedom of choice and the common good.

Considered one of the greatest achievements of modern medicine, vaccines play a vital role in the prevention of infectious diseases. They have been proven to avoid millions of deaths and protect millions more from getting sick each year. But to unlock the full innovative potential of vaccines, action must be taken to overcome barriers to vaccine equity and to address the root causes of vaccine hesitancy.

Recognizing the urgency of these issues and the essential role international and cross-sectoral collaborations can play in advancing these causes, the World Medical Association (WMA), the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAL), and the German Medical Association (GMA) have joined forces to demand that all relevant stakeholders exhaust all efforts to:

- ensure equitable global access to vaccines, which is a key prerequisite for a successful global vaccination campaign, and
- confront vaccine hesitancy by sending a clear message about the safety and necessity of vaccines and counteracting vaccine myths and disinformation.