



AVAC, ITPC and TAG Announcement on the Launch of the COVID Advocates Advisory Board

August 2020

Global health advocates establish a COVID Advocates Advisory Board to ensure community engagement in COVID research

Contact

Kay Marshall, kay@avac.org

Othoman Mellouk, omellouk@itpcglobal.org

Richard Jefferys, richard.Jefferys@treatmentactiongroup.org

The novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has unleashed a global pandemic and an unprecedented public health crisis. Efforts to rapidly develop urgently needed biomedical strategies to diagnose, prevent, and treat COVID-19 are underway worldwide. However, these greatly accelerated clinical trial timelines for COVID-19 research can only be achieved through equally ambitious efforts to thoroughly and thoughtfully engage the communities most affected by the pandemic in all aspects of the research process.

Robust community engagement and consultation is essential to support the ethical, efficient advancement of COVID R&D; build understanding and support for research studies in the communities in which they occur; and ensure equitable, global access to urgently needed interventions. Conversely, clinical trials undertaken without robust community engagement are less likely to recruit and retain volunteers; are more apt to provoke mistrust, suspicion, and resistance; and produce results that are less likely to be acted upon with urgency.

Fortunately, the platforms, normative frameworks, and research-literate community networks that can facilitate effective and creative community engagement in COVID-19 R&D already exist. Building upon a strong foundation developed largely through HIV and TB research, AVAC, TAG and ITPC are partnering with health advocates, civil society representatives and impacted individuals around the world to launch a [COVID Advocates Advisory Board \(CAAB\)](#) that can immediately engage on the wide range of clinical research currently being conducted and proposed.

We are calling on international research collaborations, including all four pillars of WHO's ACT-Accelerator (ACT-A) and the US Government's Operation Warp Speed, ACTIV and CoVPN programs, to engage substantively with the CAAB and other community mechanisms in research planning, development, implementation, and dissemination of results. We further call on product developers, researchers and research sponsors to prioritize meaningful community engagement and partnership as a means to ensure research is conducted to the highest possible scientific, ethical and public health standards, in the fastest way possible, and to ensure rapid, equitable access for those interventions that are successfully developed.

The CAAB emphasizes the need for broad representation across affected communities in research planning, design, and outreach; investing in developing community research literacy; and the importance of the [Good Participatory Practice \(GPP\) Guidelines](#) as a roadmap for researchers. The CAAB also recognizes that while COVID impacts everyone, not all people are at equal risk, and differences in

geography, race, gender, class, age, and occupation are associated with vast disparities in risks of infection, disease, and death. As such, the CAAB is deeply committed to ensuring communities most at risk have a central voice in every level of the R&D process.

The CAAB has been designed as a ready platform to facilitate meaningful dialogue among research teams and communities; provide stakeholders' perspectives on the design, planning, and implementation of clinical trials; enable open communication about research goals, processes, and results; and advocate for equitable access to products developed through COVID R&D to all people in need. The CAAB has already begun to build common understanding and capacity around COVID research, which can be tailored and adapted to different contexts and communities.

###

Since the early days of the HIV epidemic, AVAC, TAG, ITPC and many other advocates have advocated for meaningful community engagement for HIV, TB and health research.

About AVAC: Founded in 1995, AVAC is a non-profit organization that uses education, policy analysis, advocacy and a network of global collaborations to accelerate the ethical development and global delivery of HIV prevention options as part of a comprehensive response to the pandemic. For more information, visit www.avac.org.

About ITPC: The International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) is a global network of people living with HIV, community activists, and their supporters working to achieve universal access to HIV treatment and other life-saving medicines. As an issue-based coalition, ITPC actively advocates for treatment access across the globe through the focus of three strategic priorities: Treatment education and demand creation ([#TreatPeopleRight](https://twitter.com/TreatPeopleRight)); Intellectual property and access to medicines ([#MakeMedicinesAffordable](https://twitter.com/MakeMedicinesAffordable)); Community monitoring and accountability ([#WatchWhatMatters](https://twitter.com/WatchWhatMatters)). For more information, visit <https://itpcglobal.org>.

About TAG: Treatment Action Group (TAG) is an independent, activist and community-based research and policy think tank fighting for better treatment, prevention, a vaccine and a cure for HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis C virus. TAG works to ensure that all people with HIV, TB and HCV receive lifesaving treatment, care and information. We are science-based treatment activists working to expand and accelerate vital research and effective community engagement with research and policy institutions. For more information, visit www.treatmentactiongroup.org.