

Dear polio eradication supporter,

I'm pleased to write you as Chair of the Polio Oversight Board (POB), at an important moment on our journey to achieving a polio-free world. It goes without saying that this has been an unprecedented period in global health, with the COVID-19 pandemic setting back 25 years of progress in immunization coverage in just 25 weeks last year. Progress toward polio eradication was no exception.

To protect communities and health workers from COVID-19, we made the difficult decision to pause campaigns from March to July 2020, pivoting polio eradication staff and infrastructure to urgently support the pandemic response. The investments the world has made in building these polio assets paid off, helping more than 50 countries conduct disease surveillance, strengthen community engagement, and amplify public health messaging at a critical time.

While our support continues, this pause in polio work also came at a cost. Millions of children missed their polio vaccinations and routine immunization was disrupted. The pandemic exacerbated persistent challenges to the program, including low immunization coverage and inadequate access to vulnerable communities. This meant that transmission of wild and circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus continued into 2021, and it became clear that the polio program needed to transform its approach and operate with more urgency and accountability than ever before.

This is why I am pleased to announce that the GPEI has introduced a new five-year strategic plan to achieve a polio-free world, as noted by global health leaders and Ministers of Health at the 74th World Health Assembly in May. The [Polio Eradication Strategy 2022-2026: Delivering on a Promise](#) outlines a roadmap to address final challenges and accomplish two clear goals: 1) interrupting all poliovirus transmission in the last two endemic countries and 2) stopping circulating vaccine derived poliovirus (cVDPV) transmission and preventing outbreaks in non-endemic countries.

The strategy leverages innovative tools and approaches to overcome current barriers and improves the core strategies that have enabled progress against polio eradication to date. Some examples include: increasing advocacy efforts to encourage greater accountability and ownership across all levels of government; strengthening relationships with communities and more systematically pairing the delivery of polio vaccines with the provision of other essential health services to increase polio vaccine uptake; and implementing innovations like the [type 2 novel oral polio vaccine](#) to more sustainably stop cVDPV outbreaks, as well as digital payment systems to reduce delays in outbreak response. Underpinning these efforts is a firm commitment to gender equality. By empowering women at all levels of the program, from global leaders to frontline workers, we have the best chance to stopping all forms of polio for good.

This strategic plan was developed through an in-depth, consultative process with a diverse set of stakeholders across polio-affected country governments, donors, and the broader health community. On behalf of the POB, I'd like to thank all of you who have contributed to this process, as well as those who provided input to the [GPEI governance review](#). Your thoughtful engagement will continue to be critical in supporting the successful implementation of this strategy over the next five years.

I am also pleased to welcome donor representatives to GPEI governance groups, following recommendations from the GPEI management review. Thank you to representatives from the following donors who will serve as full members for 12 months: Global Affairs Canada, joining the POB; the UK Foreign, Commonwealth &

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Development Office (FCDO), joining the Strategy Committee (SC); and USAID and FCDO, joining the Financial Accountability Committee (FAC).

On June 10, the GPEI officially launched the new strategy in a [virtual, livestreamed event](#) featuring political leadership from the two remaining endemic countries, Dr. Faisal Sultan, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM), Pakistan and Dr. Wahid Majrooh, Acting Minister of Public Health, Afghanistan. Additional participation included Dr. Hala Zayed, Minister of Health and Population, Egypt and Co-Chair of the Regional Sub-Committee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks and Dr. Faisal Shuaib, Executive Director and CEO, National Primary Health Care Development Agency, Nigeria. H.E. Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and current Chair of the African Union, called for all governments to strengthen commitments to finish the job on polio in Africa. The event also showcased strong commitment from all members of the POB, as well as from Bill Gates.

I was honored to help launch the strategy from the National Emergency Operations Center in Islamabad during the POB mission to Pakistan, where I was joined by leadership from all levels of the GPEI including the WHO and UNICEF Regional Directors Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari and George Laryea-Adjei. High-level country leadership, including Prime Minister Imran Khan, Chief of Army Staff General Bajwa, SAPM Dr. Sultan, and provincial chief ministers, reiterated their commitment to urgently achieving a polio-free Pakistan, and there was agreement that we must collectively strengthen our efforts to capitalize on the current trough in poliovirus transmission and end WPV for good.

Hard work also lies ahead outside of Pakistan, to ensure every last child is immunized against this disease in *all* geographies affected by polio, including Afghanistan and countries across Africa and parts of Asia, and to protect hard-won gains in polio-free areas. We must deliver quality polio immunization campaigns, rapid outbreak response and strong program management to ensure no child is missed. We look forward to strengthening our partnerships with governments to implement synchronized polio immunization campaigns across Africa later this year, to stop the swiftly spreading cVDPV outbreaks.

It will be equally critical that all of our partners, donors, and stakeholders double down on efforts to ensure the GPEI has the financial resources needed to deliver a polio-free world by 2026. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us again that GPEI tools and infrastructure are critical resources in many countries for addressing broader health emergencies. We need to continue investing in these assets to end polio – and ensure they are available ahead of the next big health emergency.

I am confident that with sufficient political and financial support for this new GPEI strategy, together we will be able to deliver on the promise of a polio-free world.

Best regards,



Christopher J. Elias, MD, MPH
President, Global Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Chair, Polio Oversight Board, Global Polio Eradication Initiative

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