

COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force

ISSUE: ISED and NRC have received media questions on conflicts of interest among Vaccine Task Force members.

KEY MESSAGES (101 words)

- **When the Government of Canada set up the Vaccine Task Force, it was clear its membership needed to include experienced experts and industry leaders that have a track record of developing and delivering vaccines.**
- **Their advice provides invaluable insight that comes from on-the-ground experience and helps ensure the government is making the best decisions to protect the health and safety of Canadians during this pandemic.**
- **In order to mitigate the risk of conflicts of interest, the task force uses conflict screens to ensure that, where a disqualifying conflict exists, that member will not contribute to the advice provided to the government.**

SUPPLEMENTARY MESSAGES

How do the conflict screens work?

- **When assessing projects for funding, members are required to be transparent about their interests and potential for conflict. Those in a disqualifying conflict position will recuse themselves from providing advice on those projects.**
- **Each member has signed a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreement, and completed and signed a Conflict of Interest Declaration form. At the start of each meeting, the co-Chairs ask members to declare any conflicts with the agenda items of that meeting and ask members who have a disqualifying conflict to recuse themselves from that particular discussion.**
- **The conflict of interest protocol is publicly available on the National Research Council's website.**

What is considered a disqualifying conflict?

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- **A disqualifying conflict includes a direct or indirect financial benefit, close personal relationships (both positive and negative), undue institutional / regional loyalties, and other influences that cloud an objective assessment.**

How many times have task force members recused themselves due to a conflict of interest?

- **Since June 2020, the COVID-19 Task Force and its Bio-manufacturing Sub-Committee have reviewed and provided advice on 40 domestic vaccine and bio-manufacturing proposals. In 18 instances, a task force member declared a conflict of interest pertaining to a specific proposal, recused themselves, and did not participate in deliberations or the formulation of advice.**
- **These 18 instances were limited to [number] members.**
- **During that time, the task force also reviewed and provided advice on 18 international vaccine candidates, and no conflicts of interest were identified.**

Why are the conflict of interest declarations not publicly listed on the registry?

- **The task force from the outset established a formal process for members to declare interests and to recuse themselves from deliberations where there is a conflict of interest.**
- **These declarations have all been monitored and formally documented by the Task Force Secretariat, as have been the Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreements that have been submitted.**
- **As a volunteer external advisory body, members of the task force do not submit their Conflict of Interest declarations to the public registry. The records of the task force, including its recommendations to the government, are logged into the official files of the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.**
- **This process is entirely consistent with other volunteer external advisory bodies to government.**

Has the ethics commissioner been consulted?

- **As a volunteer external advisory body, members of the task force do not report declarations to the ethics commissioner. All of their Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreements are reported to Innovation Science and Economic Development and the Secretariat, and all members recuse themselves from a recommendation when deemed to be in conflict.**
- **All recommendations of the Task Force and records of recusals are formally reported in writing to the responsible Ministers and are kept as part of the official records of the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. This process is entirely consistent with other volunteer external advisory bodies to government.**

BACKGROUND

On August 5, 2020, Minister Bains and Minister Anand announced the creation and membership of the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force. The task force's mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on Canada's COVID-19 vaccine strategy, with a focus on investments to support the development and production of a safe and effective vaccine for Canadians.

Since June 2020, the task force has been providing advice on prioritizing vaccine projects seeking support for activities in Canada, identifying and connecting with international vaccine candidates of

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interest to Canada, and considering options to manufacture the most promising COVID-19 vaccines. The task force has up to 18 members, including two co-Chairs and four ex-officio members. It will be in place for a period of at least 12 months, subject to extension at the discretion of the Government of Canada.

The task force's mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 vaccines, which can include the following:

- prioritizing vaccine projects seeking support for activities in Canada;
- attracting to Canada promising non-Canadian vaccine candidates, or partnering with developers of non-Canadian vaccine candidates;
- optimizing the tools needed for vaccine development;
- supporting effective research and development, and supply chain coordination for COVID-19 vaccine projects;
- facilitating solutions to manufacture the most promising COVID-19 vaccines in Canada; and,
- identifying opportunities to enhance business connectivity globally to secure access to vaccines with key commercial sponsors.

Vaccine proposals submitted to ISED seeking SIF funding are reviewed by the Vaccine Task Force (VTF). Upon completion of the review, the VTF provides advice to the Ministers of HC and ISI for their consideration and support. ISED then undertakes final internal due diligence on the project proposals and then submits analysis and advice to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry who has full decision-making authority related to all SIF funding decisions.

PREPARATION AND APPROVALS

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