

## COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force

---

**ISSUE:** ISED and the NRC have received media questions regarding conflicts of interest for Vaccine Task Force members.

### KEY MESSAGES

- **The Vaccine Task Force was created to provide advice to the Government of Canada on the development, access to and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines.**
- **The Task Force is comprised of experts who are volunteering their time to help ensure that the government is making sound evidence-based decisions to protect the health and safety of Canadians during the pandemic.**
- **Although Task Force members are not public office holders, they are being transparent about their interests and are formally recusing themselves from providing advice on projects where there could be a conflict.**

### SUPPLEMENTARY MESSAGES

- The Vaccine Task Force is a multi-disciplinary group of experts whose mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 vaccines.
- Members of the Task Force are volunteers who have stepped-up to serve Canada during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Since June, the members have worked tirelessly to study, review and debate the many vaccine options that are available, so that the government's decisions are based on the best available evidence.
- The Task Force is recommending a portfolio of different vaccines, and the government will continue to announce new vaccine contracts in line with this strategy in the near future.
- The Task Force's recommendations regarding which vaccine candidates to pursue are consistent with the decisions being made by other countries.
- The government thanks the members for their ongoing work and service to Canada during this critical time.

***If pressed on the recent resignation of one of the Task Force members (Dr. Gary Kobinger):***

- The government appreciates the contributions of all Task Force members, and is disappointed that the Task Force will no longer benefit from one of its' members' expertise.

Last Revised: September 20, 2020

- As experts and industry leaders, Task Force members provide invaluable insight -- all on a volunteer basis -- to help the government make sound evidence-based decision to protect the health and safety of Canadians during the pandemic.
- Since June 2020, the Task Force and its Bio-manufacturing Sub-Committee have reviewed and provided advice on 64 domestic vaccine and bio-manufacturing proposals and international vaccine candidates.
- The process related to this advice is in line with similar task forces around the world.
- Task Force members have committed to ensuring transparency and to recusing themselves from providing advice on projects where there is a conflict.
- The conflict of interest protocol available on the NRC website is in line with standards for other councils across government with members who are not public office holders, and embodies international best practices.

***If pressed on differences of opinion within the Vaccine Task Force:***

- The Vaccine Task Force is a multi-disciplinary group of recognized experts whose mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 vaccines.
- Free and open debate among members of the Task Force is an important part of the deliberation process.
- When scientists and other experts disagree, the discussion that ensues contributes to the quality of the advice that is received by the government.

***If pressed on whether Vaccine Task Force meetings should be open to the media/public:***

- The Vaccine Task Force reviews commercially confidential and sensitive information, and discussions occur in confidence.
- All Task Force members have signed non-disclosure agreements.
- Journalists and reporters have access to Task Force members, who have granted multiple interviews and have spoken about their voluntary work in an open and transparent way, without contravening the non-disclosure agreements.

***If pressed on why the government put together a body where members have conflicts:***

- The Vaccine Task Force was created to provide advice to the Government of Canada on the development, access to and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Members of the Task Force were appointed because of their significant experience in vaccines -- experience that is critical to providing the best possible advice to the government.
- As experts with deep experience in vaccines, Task Force members naturally have ties to various companies in their field of expertise.
- There is a sound protocol in place to manage potential conflicts of interests.
- Canada's approach is consistent with other countries', including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and France.

***If pressed on whether the government is pursuing a sound strategy:***

- The Government of Canada is pursuing a balanced portfolio approach to the COVID-19 vaccine, and is intentionally investing in different vaccine types so that all bases covered.
- Actions being taken are based on the best possible expert advice, and are consistent with the approach and actions being taken by other countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and France.

***If pressed more generally on who needs to be informed about conflicts of interest:***

- Generally, conflicts of interest are declared by experts when providing advice, speaking or publishing -- for example, if publishing research in a scientific publication, any conflicts are disclosed to the reader in the article.
- This is also the case when experts provide advice and/or recommendations to the government -- conflicts are disclosed, documented, and the expert recuses themselves.
- Disclosure of conflict of interest relates to the specific activities that are undertaken, as experts often participate in several files, fields and expert groups.

***If pressed on how conflict screens work:***

- When assessing projects for funding, members are required to be transparent about their interests and potential for conflict. Those with conflicts formally recuse themselves.
- Each Task Force member 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 discussion.

Last Revised: September 20, 2020

- The conflict of interest protocol is publicly available on the NRC's website.

***If pressed on what is considered a disqualifying conflict:***

- 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 could cloud an objective assessment.

***If pressed on how many times Task Force members have recused themselves due to a conflict of interest:***

- Since June 2020, the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force and its Bio-manufacturing Sub-Committee have reviewed and provided advice on 64 domestic vaccine and bio-manufacturing proposals and international vaccine candidates.
- In 23 instances, a member of the Task Force declared a conflict of interest pertaining to a specific proposal, or candidate, and formally recused themselves -- not participating in deliberations or the formulation of advice.

***If pressed on why the conflict of interest declarations are not publicly listed on the registry:***

- The Task Force established a formal process at the outset for members to declare interests and to recuse themselves from deliberations where there is a conflict of interest.
- These declarations have been monitored and formally documented by the Task Force Secretariat, as have 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 consistent with other volunteer external advisory bodies to government.

***If pressed on consultations with the ethics commissioner:***

- Members of the Task Force are not public office holders.
- As a volunteer external advisory body, members do not report declarations to the ethics commissioner. Members' 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 ISED records. 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 (VTF). The VTF'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 VTF has been providing advice on prioritizing vaccine projects seeking support for activities in Canada, identifying and connecting with international vaccine candidates of interest to Canada, and considering options to manufacture the most promising COVID-19 vaccines. The VTF has 12 members, including two co-Chairs. There are also four senior federal officials who are ex-officio

members. The VTF will be in place for a period of at least 12 months, subject to extension at the discretion of the Government of Canada.

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

- 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 Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) funding are reviewed by the VTF. Upon completion of the review, the VTF provides advice to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry for their consideration and support. ISED then undertakes final internal due diligence on the project proposals and submits analysis and advice to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, who has decision-making authority related to SIF funding decisions.

#### **PREPARATION AND APPROVALS**

**SCMS contact:** James Lewis, Manager, 613-720-2717

**SCMS approval:** Vicky Eatrides, ADM, 613-292-4016

**Sector approval:** Mitch Davies, Senior ADM, 343-291-2116