GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH INTELLIGENCE NETWORK (GPHIN))

SYNOPSIS

The Globe and Mail has published a series of articles critical of the Public Health Agency of Canada's early response to COVID-19, and focussed on what it describes as the decline of the Global Public Health Intelligence Network (GPHIN). In response, the Minister of Health has ordered an independent review of GPHIN.

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the Government of Canada doing to respond to concerns about Canada's pandemic warning system?

KEY MESSAGES

- The Government of Canada is committed to scientific excellence and I am committed to ensuring this country has an effective early warning system for potential emergencies – including pandemics.

- That is why, in the coming weeks, I will launch an independent review of Canada's global public health monitoring system.

- To be clear, the Global Public Health Intelligence Network was never shut down, and GPHIN continues to play an important role in the response to COVID-19.

- The results of the review will help inform future decisions around Canada's global public health monitoring system.

IF PRESSED FOR DETAILS ON THE INDEPENDENT REVEW

- We are establishing a diverse panel of professionals with the appropriate experience and expertise to conduct this review.

IF PRESSED ON THE ISSUANCE OF ALERTS

- The issuance of alerts will be examined as part of the independent review of Canada's global public health monitoring system.

- While the number of alerts decreased in recent years, at no time has GPHIN been directed to cease or slow its information gathering and sharing activities.

- Canadian users continue to receive timely information about public health issues through a daily GPHIN report and have ongoing access to the GPHIN database. This includes federal, provincial, and territorial government officials.

IF PRESSED ON SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- GPHIN source information includes a global news database and research platform that contains nearly 33,000 sources. This includes newswires, media, publications, government sources, and medical expert forums.

BACKGROUND

GPHIN: KEY FACTS

The Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) Global Public Health Intelligence Network (GPHIN) is an early-warning and situational awareness system for potential chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear public health threats worldwide, including outbreaks of infectious disease. GPHIN users include non-governmental public health agencies and organizations, as well as government authorities who conduct public health surveillance. GPHIN requires a free subscription from eligible users. GPHIN is a significant contributor to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources.

GPHIN consists of two critical components:
- a professional multidisciplinary team of life science analysts conducting rapid risk assessments to detect public health threats; and
- an Information Management Tool that uses machine learning and natural language processing to facilitate the work of the analysts.

Every day, GPHIN analysts conduct their daily review of, on average, 7,000 articles in nine languages (Arabic, Farsi, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and simplified and traditional Chinese) to validate and assess the data for inclusion in reports, including the GPHIN Daily Report published each morning. This report goes directly from GPHIN to Canadian public health practitioners at the federal, provincial and territorial levels, including senior management at the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and other government departments.

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