

Annex B: Looking Ahead and Uncertainties

There are several uncertainties against which we are planning for a future COVID-19 programme and which will influence how the programme will evolve, including:

- *Demand:* Our ability to predict future demand for the proposed programme is limited, with several factors impacting countries' abilities to plan, develop, and execute long-term immunisation plans. The Secretariat is consulting countries to better understand their appetite for a future COVID-19 vaccine programme. While there are indications that some countries are eager to begin a COVID-19 programme - and some have already begun integrating COVID-19 vaccines into their health systems - global demand has waned over 2022 as the world has shifted out of the acute phase of the pandemic. The Secretariat has used primary vaccine coverage projections to estimate demand for a future COVID-19 programme starting in 2024. However, a better understanding of the demand for a COVID-19 programme will emerge from the detailed Alliance wide demand planning process in 2023, and the Secretariat will share updated demand projections at the June 2023 Board meeting.
- *Vaccine Products:* Depending on the evolution of the virus, it is unclear whether the current vaccine products will continue to be effective or that manufacturers will continue to manufacture them. Further evolution of products and implications on efficacy (including against transmission), durability, required frequency of boosters, and programmatic feasibility are also uncertain.
- *Epidemiology of the virus:* Although this programme is designed for the WHO's current base-case scenario, there is potential for new variants to emerge that could be more severe or more immune-escaping against current vaccines. Variants could affect population groups differently, which could impact which demographics and population cohorts are prioritised for vaccination by SAGE, including the potential inclusion of different VCVs. Historically, surges have not followed predictable patterns or seasonality, making planning difficult.
- *Impact:* Estimating public health impacts for potential future support is challenging given the number of variables, assumptions and uncertainties involved. Modelled estimates are highly sensitive and as such, should be considered with appropriate caution in view of key evidence gaps that exist. As more evidence is generated in the coming months, for example on vaccine efficacy, these estimates are likely to change. The Secretariat will continue to engage impact modelling groups to generate updates as needed.
- *Non-vaccine tools:* As COVID-19 becomes endemic, the potential market for new therapeutics to treat or prevent the symptoms is expected to grow and with it, industry investment in innovative therapies. If efforts are taken to make these accessible and affordable, it is possible that the opportunity cost for a country to

implement a routine vaccine programme will increase and they will opt to dedicate COVID-19 resources to securing novel antivirals or other therapeutics.

- *Global economy:* The current global economic outlook is creating fiscal constraints for many countries, which will influence how they prioritise their domestic health financing. It is unclear if this will still be the case in 2023 when countries will undergo demand planning for 2024. If fiscally constrained, countries may choose not to implement a future COVID-19 programme if they are required to co-finance the vaccines.

Given the uncertainties, there is inherent risk associated with the programme; however, the Secretariat is committed to tracking how assumptions may change, reassessing programme feasibility as new developments materialise, and continued reporting to the Board and relevant committees.