



Life Sciences  
Innovation Forum

**Webinar Series on the Role of Vaccination in Maintaining Health and the Economy During Pandemics  
“Combating Vaccine Hesitancy to Foster Resilient Life-Course Immunization Programs”**

3 March 2021

On 3 March, the APEC Life Sciences Innovation Forum (LSIF) hosted a webinar entitled [Combating Vaccine Hesitancy to Foster Resilient Life-Course Immunization Programs](#). This webinar brought together four expert presenters, **Dr. Heidi Larsson, Dr. Lulu Bravo, Kaitlin Christenson, and Litjen Tan** to consider the determinants of vaccine hesitancy and proactive mitigation strategies. It was the second in the series, [The Role of Vaccination in Maintaining Health and the Economy During Pandemics](#).

### **The Landscape of Vaccine Hesitancy**

Opening speakers Heidi Larsson and Lulu Bravo offered global insights into vaccine hesitancy and acceptance, noting evidence of improvement in overall perception of the importance of vaccines in recent years. However, questions of safety and effectiveness persist, including within APEC (e.g., Indonesia, which has seen a 14% fall in perception of safety since 2015, and a 12% decline in perception of effectiveness<sup>1</sup>; or the Philippines, where poor communication around the safe uptake of dengue vaccines has had lasting impacts on public attitudes). A wide variety of hesitancy “risk factors” were highlighted by speakers, including dissemination of misinformation, uncertainties among the population around science and safety, anti-vaccination lobbies and influencers, and conspiracy theories. Litjen Chan highlighted the persistent difficulty of messaging for uptake of preventive measures.

### **Building Knowledge About the Drivers of Vaccine Acceptance**

Kaitlin Christensen of the Sabin Vaccine Institute reviewed recent research insights on the drivers of vaccines hesitancy and acceptance from Sabin’s collaborations with the Aspen Institute and the Johns Hopkins International Vaccines Access Center (IVAC). This included recognition of the significant influence that strong social networks, including social media, may have on vaccination decisions; and the role of community health workers with strong communications skills in increasing acceptance. Gaps in research literature on hesitancy remain, however, notably a lack of study on the impact of social media in low- and middle-income settings.

### **The Role of Immunization Coalitions to Build Vaccines Confidence**

Larsson noted the need to put science in context and recognize cultural, social, political issues surrounding vaccination, as even the best science will not be accepted if these factors go overlooked. Similarly, Litjen Chan opened his remarks with an acknowledgement that “science is less relevant in many ways than risk communication”, meaning that the import of a powerful narrative cannot be discounted. To fill this need, Chan encourages leveraging partnerships, namely immunization coalitions, to target the issue of hesitancy “with a unified message”. Coalitions like the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) and National Adult Influenza Summit

#### **Key Hesitancy Risk Factors**

- Dissemination of misinformation
- Uncertainties among populations around safety and science behind vaccines
- Anti-vaccination influencers, including conspiracy theorists
- Complacency

#### **Key Practices to Combat Hesitancy**

- Community engagement and identification of hesitancy risks prior to the roll-out of vaccination campaigns
- Leverage social media and town halls, working with community influencers to disseminate messages
- Communication of accurate science, safety, and risk-benefit considerations related to vaccination.
- Systematic surveillance and monitoring of vaccine hesitancy, including discussions of hesitancy online
- Further research on the drivers of vaccine hesitancy, with focus on LMICs
- Engagement with healthcare professionals, including equipping them with the information needed to communicate benefits of vaccination

<sup>1</sup> Alexandre de Figueiredo, Clarissa Simas, Emilie Karafillakis, Pauline Paterson, & Heidi Larsson (2020). [“Mapping global trends in vaccine confidence and investigating barriers to vaccine uptake: a large-scale retrospective temporal modelling study”](#). *The Lancet* 396(10255).



## Life Sciences Innovation Forum

(NAIS) were elevated as forums for partnership to coalesce ideas and actions, and organizing partners into a cohesive structure to expand the reach of immunization programs.

Other speakers also addressed the role of partnerships to combat vaccine hesitancy. Christensen noted that, given the importance of social and behavioral science in shaping hesitancy, the public sector can benefit from drawing on from what the academic and non-profit sector is learning about the design of immunization programs. Bravo, meanwhile, highlighted the partnership work underway within the Immunization Partners in Asia Pacific, which aims to put vaccination at the forefront of health delivery systems.

### **Practices for Combatting Hesitancy**

A central thread across the discussion was the importance of community outreach to push populations towards acceptance of vaccines. Health stakeholders must work to identify anxieties in the community and work to address them before, not during, vaccination campaigns. Stakeholders should consider issues of trust, power, and social relations when considering hesitancy, for example experiences of trauma from earlier mishandled health programs. Larsson highlighted the success story of Indonesia – an early adopter of the Sinovac vaccine for COVID-19 –which accompanied its vaccination campaign with confidence building, e.g., pre-campaign engagement with the influential Islamic Council. Additionally, the importance of continued monitoring and research was recognized as valuable. The lack of systematic monitoring and surveillance leaves countries unprepared to address misinformation when it arises.

Proactive communication on the benefits and value of vaccination is another crucial component. This includes leveraging strategies such as town halls and social media campaigns to reach communities with credible and scientifically sound pro-vaccine messaging. Stakeholders must also communicate that the benefits of vaccination outweigh risks. Chan advised APEC stakeholders to focus on communicating the fact that vaccine preventable disease morbidity is a cost burden to economies, and that a well-vaccinated population reduces health system costs.

Lulu Bravo emphasized in her remarks that healthcare professionals (e.g., nurses, midwives, pharmacists) indeed want to be involved in the solution to crises like COVID-19, and health decisionmakers should engage them in positive conversations when executing immunization programs. Christensen noted research indicating that community health workers with strong communications skills may increase vaccine acceptance, providing additional urgency to working with these stakeholders and equipping them with the pro-vaccination messaging needed to be effective.

*To view a recording of the webinar and associated presentation slides, [please visit the event page](#).  
To participate in future webinars, [please register online](#) and you will be notified of future sessions.*



Life Sciences  
Innovation Forum

### Further Reading

#### Sabin Vaccine Institute

- Sabin-Aspen Vaccine Science & Policy Group: [Meeting the Challenge of Vaccination Hesitancy](#) (2020)
- Sabin Vaccine Institute Immunization Advocates Program, in collaboration with the International Pediatric Association: [Vaccine Trust Project](#)

#### Immunization Action Coalition

- View key [publications here](#)

Alexandre de Figueiredo, Clarissa Simas, Emilie Karafillakis, Pauline Paterson, & Heidi Larsson (2020). "[Mapping global trends in vaccine confidence and investigating barriers to vaccine uptake: a large-scale retrospective temporal modelling study](#)". *The Lancet* 396(10255).

Sarah Lane, Noni E. MacDonald, Melanie Marti, Laure Dumolard (2018). "[Vaccine hesitancy around the globe: Analysis of 3 years of WHO/UNICEF Joint Reporting Form data – 2015-2017](#)". *Vaccine* 36(26).

Shibani Kulkarni, Bonnie Harvey, Dimitri Prybylski & Mohamed F. Jalloh (2021). "[Trends in classifying vaccine hesitancy reasons reported in the WHO/UNICEF Joint Reporting Form, 2014–2017: Use and comparability of the Vaccine Hesitancy Matrix](#)." *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics (Online)*.

Malik Sallam (2021). "[COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy worldwide: a systematic review of vaccine acceptance rates](#)". *Vaccines* 9(2).



Life Sciences  
Innovation Forum

Meeting Agenda	
Opening remarks and welcome	
Presentations	<b><u>Combatting Vaccine Hesitancy to Ensure Effective Delivery and Uptake of Vaccines across the Life Course</u></b>  Heidi Larsson (Pre-Recorded), Professor, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Diseases  Lulu Bravo, President, Immunization Partners in Asia Pacific
	<b><u>Studying, Understanding &amp; Addressing Crises in Vaccines Confidence</u></b>  Kaitlin Christenson, Vice President, Vaccine Acceptance and Demand, Sabin Vaccine Institute
	<b><u>Partnerships to Reduce Hesitancy and Build Vaccines Confidence</u></b>  Litjen Tan, Chief Strategy Officer, Immunization Action Coalition
Question and Answer Session	
Closing Remarks	

### Speaker Biographies



#### Heidi Larson

Dr. Heidi Larson is Professor of Anthropology, Risk and Decision Science and the Founding Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. She was unable to join live for today's discussion and has shared pre-recorded remarks. Dr. Larson is also Clinical Professor of Health Metrics Sciences, University of Washington, Seattle, USA, and Guest Professor at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. She previously headed Global Immunization Communication at UNICEF, chaired GAVI's Advocacy Task Force, and served on the WHO SAGE Working Group on vaccine hesitancy.



#### Lulu Bravo

Dr. Lulu Bravo is Professor Emeritus at the University of the Philippines Manila College of Medicine. She currently serves as president of Immunization Partners in Asia Pacific (IPAP), and is the founding president of the Philippine Foundation for Vaccination. She is also the former Vice Chancellor for Research and Executive Director of the National Institutes of Health at the University of the Philippines. Dr. Bravo completed her MD, pediatric residency and subspecialty training in infectious disease at Philippine General Hospital-College of Medicine of the University of the Philippines. She has published more than 100 scientific articles, books and book chapters in both local and international circles.



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Innovation Forum**



**Kaitlin Christenson**

Kaitlin Christenson is the vice president for Vaccine Acceptance and Demand at the Sabin Vaccine Institute. In this role, she oversees several programmatic areas including education for media and health care professionals on vaccines and immunization, support for community-level social and behavioral research to better understand vaccine acceptance and hesitancy, and research into social media's influence on vaccination decisions. Ms. Christenson holds a master's degree in public health from the George Washington University and a bachelor's of science degree in biology and French from Virginia Tech.



**LJ Tan**

Dr. LJ Tan is Chief Strategy Officer at the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC). Prior to joining IAC, Dr. Tan was director of medicine and public health at the American Medical Association (AMA). For 11 years he was the AMA's director of infectious disease, immunology, and molecular medicine. He co-founded and co-chairs the National Adult and Influenza Immunization Summit, and he continues to advise the Flu Summit of the Asia Pacific Alliance for the Control of Influenza (APACI). Dr. Tan is an editor for several publications, and has published more than 50 peer-reviewed articles.