

# Vaccine Access and Health Security Initiative (VAHSI)

## Gender Equality Disability & Social Inclusion Strategy

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how social inequalities and environments influence risk and vulnerability to the social, economic and long-term health consequences of public health emergencies. Amplifying pre-existing inequalities, COVID-19 has had a profound impact on women and girls, people with disabilities, those living in poverty and other at-risk groups.

Combatting the pandemic relies heavily on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination and the ability to achieve high vaccination coverage. Vaccine acceptance and access will, however, be affected by the interplay between gender, disability, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status amongst other factors. Failure to consider and address social inequalities will affect vaccination uptake and coverage.

In order to achieve its end-of-program outcomes, it is important that VAHSI considers the increased vulnerabilities and risk of exclusion faced by certain groups and addresses the specific barriers they face to ensure they are not left behind.



*Photo credit: Marie Stopes Timor-Leste*

## INVESTMENT CONTEXT

The complex operating environment which underpins VAHSI presents challenges as well as opportunities to influence approaches to gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI). Activities are being developed and implemented in dynamic, complex and high-risk contexts in 18 countries across two regions. While this strategy intends to provide guidance for all activities funded through VAHSI, we recognise that many activities are well into implementation and opportunities for influence may differ between investments and contexts. VAHSI will need to be strategic in how it advocates for and advances equity, access and inclusion within Initiative activities to contribute to and support implementation of Australia's policy positions on gender equality, disability inclusion, social safeguarding, our indigenous diplomacy agenda and human rights commitments.

## OUR COMMITMENT



The VAHSI gender equality, disability and social inclusion strategy will support progress towards the Initiative's end-of program goals and outcomes focused on inclusive recovery, facilitating meaningful participation and ensuring no-one is left behind. We situate our commitment to GEDSI within Australia's policy frameworks in addition to human rights commitments and global good practice and guidance. Under this strategy, we commit to working with partner governments to monitor and address issues of inequity and to mitigate the risk of discrimination and human rights violations, leveraging national plans and priorities to achieve this. We further commit to working with partners to implement contextual approaches to gender equality, disability and social inclusion to enhance vaccine acceptance, confidence and uptake and improve access to vaccine programs.

## WHAT UNDERPINS OUR APPROACH?

### EQUITY

We recognise that vaccine prioritisation processes and the delivery of vaccination programs need to consider and be responsive to the increased vulnerabilities, risks and needs that certain groups face on account of underlying socio-economic, geographic and biomedical factors. We recognize the need to monitor for situations of inequitable vaccine access and to use our advocacy and policy engagement efforts to ensure at-risk groups are not left behind.

### RIGHTS

We recognise the importance of supporting partner governments to ensure vaccination services are safe and that programs take a 'do no harm' approach, safeguarding those at increased risk of violence, abuse and harassment. We recognise the need to ensure informed consent processes are accessible to all, vaccination acceptance is free of coercion, services do not discriminate against at-risk groups and privacy of information is protected.

### ACCESSIBILITY

We recognise the importance of supporting partner governments to ensure vaccination programs are accessible to diverse groups, in particular those at increased risk of vulnerability and disadvantage. This acknowledges the need to address those barriers that limit equitable access to vaccination information and services.

### PARTICIPATION

We recognise that community engagement and meaningful participation of a diverse range of stakeholders within COVID-19 vaccine-related programming and decision-making will enhance vaccine acceptance, confidence and access, contribute to and strengthen resilience, and support inclusive recovery.



## AREAS OF FOCUS



Accessibility of vaccine delivery & communications

Community engagement



Policy dialogue & engagement

Monitoring & reporting on vaccine access

Workforce Development

<sup>1</sup> Frameworks include WHO SAGE Values Framework for the Allocation and Prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination; WHO SAGE Roadmap for Prioritising uses of COVID-19 vaccines; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Conventions on the Rights of the Child; the Right to Health; and the SDGs.