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Docket No. FDA-2026-N-0826
Food and Drug Administration
Department of Health and Human Services

Re: Comment on the Establishment of a Public Docket and Request for Comments for the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee Meeting

Dear Commissioner of Food and Drugs:

I appreciate the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) establishment of a public docket for the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) proceedings and its invitation for stakeholder comment. This process strengthens regulatory deliberations that directly affect vaccine policy and public confidence in vaccines.

I submit these comments in my capacity as a public health researcher with expertise in vaccine communication strategies, primary care delivery, and determinants of vaccine uptake. My doctoral dissertation at Columbia University and subsequent postdoctoral work funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) examined how federal authority, trust, and evidence communication shape public acceptance of vaccination programs.

Collaborative Biosurveillance and Strain Composition

Recent influenza seasons underscore why influenza vaccine strain composition decisions, particularly for Influenza A(H3N2), depend not only on domestic surveillance but on robust global biosurveillance networks capable of detecting and anticipating antigenic drift and shift in near real time. The 2024–25 U.S. influenza season was characterized as high severity, with the highest cumulative influenza-associated hospitalization rate since 2010–11.¹ The considerable burden of influenza on our healthcare systems reinforces that timely strain selection depends on sustained participation in international genomic sequencing, antigenic characterization, and data sharing frameworks, most notably the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System, which integrates laboratory, epidemiologic, and clinical data from more than 100 countries to inform strain recommendations.^{2,3}

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, September 26). *Influenza activity in the United States during the 2024–25 season and composition of the 2025–26 influenza vaccine*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/whats-new/2025-2026-influenza-activity.html>

² World Health Organization. (2024). *Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)*. <https://www.who.int/initiatives/global-influenza-surveillance-and-response-system>

³ World Health Organization. (2024). *Recommended Composition of Influenza Virus Vaccines for use in the 2025–2026 Northern Hemisphere Influenza Season*. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/recommended-composition-of-influenza-virus-vaccines-for-use-in-the-2025-2026-nh-influenza-season>

Diplomatic engagement and multilateral coordination are therefore central to our national biosecurity and pandemic preparedness. Weakening participation in WHO-coordinated surveillance networks impairs early detection of antigenic shift, diminishes the predictive accuracy of strain selection, and ultimately reduces vaccine effectiveness in subsequent seasons. Withdrawal from WHO-coordinated surveillance systems and diminished participation in multilateral biosurveillance networks risks producing negative downstream consequences for hospitalization, ICU burden, and overall vaccine uptake. As my research demonstrates, vaccine diplomacy and biosurveillance infrastructure function as mutually reinforcing pillars of global health security.⁴ Disruptions to international cooperation reverberate through domestic vaccine policy and uptake. I urge the Committee to recognize that sustained global surveillance partnerships are indispensable to the scientific integrity and effectiveness of future influenza vaccines.

Pro-Vaccine Media is a Critical Factor in Vaccine Uptake

Media environments and pro-vaccine messaging play a significant role in shaping vaccine perceptions and behavior. Moreover, the federal government holds a unique capacity to communicate clearly and positively about vaccines in ways that encourage public uptake. Public health messaging is most effective when it translates complex scientific evidence into accessible language while emphasizing not only individual protection but also the communal benefits of vaccination, particularly the protection of vulnerable populations such as older adults and young children. Research on vaccine communication shows that messages highlighting collective responsibility and community protection have the potential to meaningfully increase vaccine acceptance.⁵

As my research demonstrates, trusted messengers and clear institutional communication are central drivers of vaccine confidence and uptake.⁶ Government partnerships with credible and recognizable public figures can further extend the reach of these messages to audiences that traditional public health channels may struggle to reach. For example, the White House's collaboration with musician Olivia Rodrigo to promote COVID-19 vaccination successfully targeted younger demographics and illustrated how trusted cultural figures can amplify pro-vaccine messaging.⁷ Strategic use of trusted spokespeople, combined with transparent government communication, can therefore strengthen public confidence in influenza vaccination and support broader vaccine uptake.

Sincerely,
Sara Jane Samuel, Ph.D., MPH

⁴ Samuel, Sara Jane. (2024). Chapter 3: *Infectious Intrusion: Examining Cold War Biosurveillance Networks in Shots for Peace: Examining the Utility of Vaccination Campaigns as a Tool of American Foreign Policy*. Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <https://doi.org/10.7916/px3j-3b28>

⁵ Shim, E., Chapman, G. B., Townsend, J. P., & Galvani, A. P. (2012). *The influence of altruism on influenza vaccination decisions*. *Journal of The Royal Society Interface*, 9(74), 2234–2243. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2012.0115>

⁶ Samuel, Sara Jane. (2024). *Shots for Peace: Examining the Utility of Vaccination Campaigns as a Tool of American Foreign Policy*. Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <https://doi.org/10.7916/px3j-3b28>

⁷ Olivia Rodrigo. (2021, July 14). *Olivia Rodrigo visits the White House to promote COVID-19 vaccination* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wHOtsQ44HA>