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Over 350 Multidisciplinary Experts from More than 100 Countries Reach Consensus on How to End COVID-19 as a Public Health Threat

A new global COVID-19 study provides actionable recommendations to end the public health threat without exacerbating socio-economic burdens or putting the most vulnerable at greater risk

Barcelona, 3 November 2022. (EMBARGOED)- SARS-CoV-2 continues to circulate among us. Although some governments have moved on, a new study published today in the journal *Nature* says that specific efforts and resources are still required to save lives. This is one of six main themes for action identified by a **large panel of experts from different disciplines and over 100 countries** to recommend **actions to end COVID-19 as a public health threat**. The findings of the consensus study, led by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)-an institution supported by “la Caixa” Foundation-, have been **endorsed by over 150 organisations** worldwide.

As of October 2022, more than **630 million COVID-19 cases** and over **6.5 million deaths** were reported (although the real death toll has been estimated to be upwards of 20 million). In addition, millions of patients with cancer and chronic disease have experienced **dangerous healthcare delays**, and **Long COVID** continues to elude definitive treatment, posing an ongoing threat to survivors. In addition, the virus also continues to accumulate **mutations** that can make it better at evading previous immunity. This is why many public health leaders, including the authors of this study, continue to regard **COVID-19 as a persistent and dangerous global health threat**.

Despite notable scientific and medical advances, the **world’s response to COVID-19 has been hindered by broader political, social, and behavioural factors** such as false information, vaccine hesitancy, inconsistent global coordination, and the inequitable distribution of equipment, vaccines and treatments. “Each country has responded differently, and often inadequately, which is partly due to **a serious lack of coordination and clear goals**,” says **Jeffrey V Lazarus**, head of the Health Systems Research Group and co-director of the Viral and Bacterial Infections Programme at ISGlobal, Associate Professor at the University of Barcelona, and coordinator of the study.

To develop **global consensus** on how to address these issues going forward, Lazarus and colleagues carried out a Delphi study, a well-established research methodology that challenges experts to garner consensus on answers to complex research questions. A **multidisciplinary panel of 386 academic, health, NGO, government and other experts** from **112 countries** and territories took part in three rounds of structured consultation. The result is a

set of **41 statements and 57 recommendations** across **six major areas**: communication; health systems; vaccination; prevention; treatment and care; and inequities.

Three of the **highest-ranked recommendations** are: i) adopt a **whole-of-society** strategy that involves multiple disciplines, sectors and actors to avoid fragmented efforts; ii) **whole-of-government** approaches (e.g. coordination between ministries) to identify, review, and address resilience in health systems and make them more responsive to people's needs; and iii) maintain a **vaccines-plus approach**, which includes a combination of COVID-19 vaccination, other structural and behavioural prevention measures, treatment, and financial support measures. The panellists also prioritised recommendations for developing **technologies** (vaccines, therapies and services) that can **reach target populations**.

Other recommendations with at least 99% agreement were: **communicating effectively** with the public, rebuilding **public trust**, and **engaging communities** in managing the pandemic response.

Only six recommendations had more than 5% disagreement, including that which considers further economic incentives to address vaccine hesitancy or a symptoms approach to diagnose COVID-19 in settings with low access to testing.

The **57 recommendations are directed at governments, health systems, industry, and other key stakeholders**. “To the greatest degree possible, our results place emphasis on health and social policy recommendations that can be **implemented in months, not years**, to help bring this public health threat to an end,” says **Quique Bassat**, ICREA professor at ISGlobal and co-author of the study.

“Our study does echo some earlier recommendations, such as the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response and WHO's 2022 plan on Strategic Preparedness,” says Lazarus, “but what makes this work unique is the **very large number of experts** consulted, the **wide geographical representation**, and the study design, which emphasises **consensus building** and identifies areas of disagreement. It may prove to be a **model for developing responses to future global health emergencies**.”

Reference

Lazarus JV, Romero D, Kopka CJ, Karim SA, Abu Raddad LJ, Almeida G *et al.* [A multinational Delphi consensus to end the COVID-19 public health threat.](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-05398-2) *Nature*, 2022. DOI: 10.1038/s41586-022-05398-2

About ISGlobal

The Barcelona Institute for Global Health, ISGlobal, is an innovative alliance between the “la Caixa” Foundation and academic and government institutions to contribute to the efforts undertaken by the international community to address the challenges in global health. ISGlobal is a consolidated hub of excellence in research that has grown out of work first started in the world of health care by the Hospital Clínic and the Parc de Salut MAR and in the academic sphere by the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. Its working model is based on the generation of scientific knowledge through Research Programmes and Groups, and its translation through the areas of Training and Analysis and Global Development. ISGlobal has been named a Severo Ochoa Centre of Excellence and is a member of the CERCA system of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

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Please, note that Professor Jeffrey V Lazarus is available for interviews in English and Spanish.

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