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Easter Seals, Civil Society

Easter Seals, a U.S. national nonprofit organization, annually serving more than one million children and adults with with autism and other disabilities and special needs and their families, offers these comments for consideration in the hopes that people most effected by the work of IGWG, the users of health care in developing and developed countries, still have an opportunity to participate more fully in the crafting of a global strategy and a plan of action that truly advances public health worldwide. Undue focus on loosening patent protections, guidelines for the manufacture and distribution of medicines, or any other single aspect of this complex system that collectively defines public health worldwide, will likely have an unnecessary and detrimental impact on health innovation and access in the developing world and possibly globally. Please consider the IGWG charge and resulting solution strategies in a broader, more holistic manner, targeting ways to increase research and development of treatments for infectious disease, while also addressing fundamental issues such as insufficient government spending on public health and health care delivery systems, inadequate preparation and support of the health care workforce, generally weak systems of health regulation and management, and the pervasive, undermining impact of poverty on the building blocks of public health, such as a lack of clean drinking water, poor sanitation systems, and low health literacy. Look also for strategies that will enhance the ability of developing nations to engage in research and development of therapeutic interventions, participate in clinical trials, interpret and utilize research results, and produce and distribute reliable, high-quality medicines and devices.

Easter Seals believes that new strategies must implement best practices and quality assurance through training for health personnel to ensure safety and effective treatment of persons participating in clinical trials or simply seeking care. In all these areas, prevention needs to be a major focus for the reduction of infectious disease.

Easter Seals joins others organizations in recommending that WHO explore alternatives to promoting access to therapeutic interventions, including emerging examples of increased access to services and medicines in the United States resulting from innovative public-private collaboration, employer-based incentives, and reduction of market barriers. WHO is encouraged to identify and promote creative approaches and incentives for enhancing research development of medicines to combat tropical and neglected diseases, but not ignore "developed world diseases," such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, that are also prevalent among developing world residents. These conditions are universal and efforts to find and implement effective treatments should be universally sought and applied. With the ease and speed of air travel, even tropical diseases and those typically associated with the developing world are less localized than before, so strategies developed by WHO might foster an understanding of shared risk, and insodoing, generate greater global interest in effective medical intervention.