

ADB'S ASSESSMENTS OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE INTRODUCTION READINESS

1. **Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine readiness assessment tool.** The Department of Health (DOH) has initiated the conduct of COVID-19 vaccine introduction readiness assessments starting October 2020. The DOH has adopted and employed the Vaccine Introduction Readiness Assessment Tool (VIRAT) of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The VIRAT looks into four core activities on (i) planning and management; (ii) supply and distribution; (iii) program delivery; and (iv) supporting systems and infrastructure.
2. **Vaccine readiness assessment.** In October 2020, DOH initially applied VIRAT to review the status of the required institutional and regulatory framework, administrative structure and protocols, coordination mechanisms, monitoring and safety, remaining gaps, as well as policy recommendations to ensure effective and efficient vaccine delivery. The VIRAT has informed the preparation of the Philippines' National COVID-19 Roadmap and subsequently the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccines (the deployment plan). Subsequent VIRATs with the latest on 15 January 2021 has shown improved readiness in vaccine delivery.
3. **Planning and Management.** The VIRAT notes that a COVID-19 Vaccine Cluster has been organized, and a COVID19 vaccine roadmap issued. Based on this roadmap, a National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID19 Vaccines has been eventually prepared by the DOH and approved by the Inter-agency agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) last 26 January 2021. The roadmap and the deployment plan aim to vaccinate 50 to 70 million people in 2021 with the deployment plan providing concrete implementation steps and clear roles for the national and local government agencies and units. The prioritization plan is consistent with WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunization allocation and prioritization values framework for COVID19 vaccines.
4. A financing plan has been prepared to cover the cost of the vaccines and administering the said vaccines with sources of financing identified. The regulatory framework was assessed to be ready for regulating the introduction of COVID19 vaccines with the Philippines Food and Drug Administration (PFDA) allowed to grant emergency use authorizations (EUAs) to these vaccines.
5. **Supply and Distribution.** The VIRAT reports that there is ongoing data gathering on the storage capacity, transportation services, and other logistics management assets of Centers of Health Development or Department of Health (DOH) regional offices, other government agencies (Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine National Police, Department of Education, others). However, it states that ultra-cold chain storage capacity not currently available in the DOH and government in general, but it has been determined to be available in private logistics companies. The terms of reference was completed by the DOH for a 3rd party private logistics firm who will complement the government cold chain and logistics capacities, and procurement expected to commence in February 2021.
6. Other gaps that had been identified are: (i) concerns on the security of staff, central and regional storage facilities, and during the transit of vaccines and materials; (ii) inadequate inventory and mapping of logistics capacity; (iii) need to update systems and protocols for vaccine stock management and operating procedures; and (iv) need to scale up social mobilization and risk communications, and data collection systems. The needed actions to address these gaps

have been reflected in the interim National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccines (the plan) dated 26 January 2021¹ which was formally approved by the IATF.

7. **Program Delivery.** VIRAT notes that COVID-19 vaccine delivery follows the multi-level governance structure of the health system and National Immunization Program (NIP) and routine immunization. DOH will supply and distribute vaccines, guide and monitor implementation, adverse events and evaluate the vaccination program. The private sector is seen as supporting to help meet the cold chain system requirements, and logistical arrangements to supply and distribute vaccines nationwide. LGUs will be responsible in on-site pre-implementation, vaccine administration and post-vaccination procedures.

8. With regards to medical waste management, a Health Care Waste Management Framework and updated health care waste management manual in place with on-site management of immunization waste going to be implemented. The Department of Health, with support from Department of Environment and Natural Resources, will tap third-party logistics firm for transport, storage, and disposal service (using government funds).

9. **Supporting Systems and Infrastructure.** Safety surveillance measures includes the presence of a National Adverse Events Following Immunization committee (NAEFIC) with membership from government and the private sectors being organized by Epidemiology Bureau and Disease Control and Prevention Bureau of the DOH. The Adverse events following immunization (AEFI) reporting guidelines and training modules specific for COVID-19 vaccines being finalized. The development of AEFI database specific for COVID-19 vaccine is also ongoing. Orientations on risk management plans with local governments, and pharmaceutical manufacturers of COVID-19 vaccines ongoing. The establishment of compensation schemes in the event that there are unintended health consequences as result of COVID-19 vaccines, including no-fault liability funds, have also been forwarded to the national legislature (Congress) for their possible actions.

10. A Vaccine Management Information System is being procured by Department of Information Communications and Technology (DICT) with Request for Information and Quotation (RFIQ) has been posted and the contract expected to be awarded in February 2021 and the system in place by March 2021. This will be funded from the government budget with the expected work to include managed services (Information Technology (IT) and operations management), and possible subscription-based solutions.

11. A COVID-19 communications plan has been launched to address vaccine hesitancy and communicate vaccine-related information including potential adverse events. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on COVID-19 vaccines have been prepared and released and initiated townhalls with hospitals and health professionals ongoing as buy-in of health sector is considered key in addressing vaccine hesitancy and risks.

12. **Conclusions.** ADB concludes that VIRAT has provided information and that its use by DOH is appropriately done. It has contributed to country vaccine needs assessment which is acceptable to ADB. In addition, we note this assessment has informed the preparation of the national deployment and vaccination plan of COVID19 vaccines.

¹ Department of Health. *National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccines*. 21 January 2021.