

## THE ROLE OF PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN ENHANCING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF IMMUNIZATION POLICY AND COMBATING ANTI-VACCINE ATTITUDES IN THE POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD: THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

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**Abstract:**The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of immunization in protecting public health. However, vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccine sentiments have become significant barriers to effective immunization strategies worldwide. This study explores the role of primary health care (PHC) in enhancing the social acceptance of immunization policies during the post-pandemic period in Uzbekistan. Drawing from international best practices and Uzbekistan's national experience, this research identifies key challenges and proposes an innovative, community-based PHC model to combat misinformation and promote vaccine confidence. The study emphasizes the importance of trust-building, continuous education, and local engagement in strengthening preventive health strategies for future resilience.

**Keywords:**Post-pandemic, immunization policy, vaccine hesitancy, anti-vaccine attitudes, primary health care, Uzbekistan, public health strategy

**Introduction:**The global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted health systems and revealed vulnerabilities in preventive health strategies. Despite rapid vaccine development, public trust in vaccination remains fragile in many countries, including Uzbekistan. The rise of anti-vaccine attitudes — fueled by misinformation and social distrust — has hindered national immunization efforts. In this context, primary health care can serve as a frontline defense in restoring public trust and ensuring equitable access to vaccines. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a global stress test for national healthcare systems, exposing systemic

vulnerabilities across countries regardless of development status. In particular, resource shortages, fragmented coordination, and insufficient primary care responses intensified the burden on both health infrastructure and medical personnel. This research focuses on analyzing these challenges in the context of Uzbekistan while incorporating comparative insights from selected international practices. To identify key systemic challenges faced by the Uzbek healthcare system during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and to develop evidence-based recommendations by examining innovative policy responses from other countries.

**Research Objectives:** To analyze the social acceptance of immunization policy in post-pandemic Uzbekistan

To examine the role of PHC in countering vaccine hesitancy

To compare Uzbekistan's experience with international best practices

To propose a sustainable and innovative PHC model to improve vaccine uptake

**Methodology:** This study uses a mixed-methods approach:

**Quantitative:** Analysis of national immunization coverage data from 2019–2024

**Qualitative:** Semi-structured interviews with PHC providers and community members in Uzbekistan

**Comparative case study:** Review of successful strategies from countries like Rwanda, Canada, and South Korea

**Policy analysis:** Examination of national policy documents, WHO guidelines, and public communication campaigns

**Key Findings:** Primary health care workers are highly trusted at the community level, but lack sufficient training in vaccine communication.

Anti-vaccine attitudes are mostly driven by misinformation spread on social media and historical mistrust in public health interventions.

Countries that integrated community-based health workers into their vaccine rollout (e.g., Rwanda) experienced higher acceptance rates. Uzbekistan's immunization program improved in coverage but remains vulnerable to public

skepticism in rural areas. The findings underscore the need to embed PHC systems with community-oriented education, culturally sensitive communication, and timely responses to misinformation. Lessons from international case studies show that public trust in health systems grows when local health providers are empowered to lead immunization outreach.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** An innovative PHC-centered model — with stronger capacity-building, digital communication training, and local engagement — can significantly improve vaccine acceptance. Uzbekistan has the opportunity to lead in the region by implementing a post-pandemic immunization framework grounded in community trust and proactive prevention.

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