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Immunization Services Support (ISS): how it works

Immunization Services Support (ISS) is an innovative kind of performance-related funding established by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) to help strengthen health systems in low-income countries in an effort to increase immunization coverage. The time-limited funding is available to all Vaccine Fund-eligible countries (i.e., with Gross National Income below US\$1000 per capita) and DTP3¹ coverage below 80%.

What is unusual about the funding scheme is that GAVI allows countries themselves to decide how the money should be spent (e.g., for training, outreach or the purchase of new vehicles or cold chain equipment) on the basis of country-identified priorities. But after an initial investment period of three years, the continuation of ISS funding for a further three years is dependent on verifiable results showing a year-on-year increase in immunization coverage. Otherwise the funding stops.

To ensure the validity of the immunization coverage data, GAVI supports an independently organized data quality audit (DQA) to verify the country's immunization reporting system.

The funding mechanism

Investment phase

GAVI's assessment of the level of financial support available to a country for the initial investment phase is based on:

- US\$20 for each **additional** child targeted to receive three doses of DTP vaccine (DTP3) in the year following approval of GAVI support, compared with the number of DTP3-immunized children in the baseline year² (i.e., the year preceding GAVI approval).

The money is paid in three instalments:

- 25% immediately on approval of GAVI support
- 25% in the first year after approval, on receipt of a satisfactory annual report
- 50% in the second year after approval, on receipt of a satisfactory annual report.

¹ Coverage with three doses of the combined vaccine against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP3) is used by WHO as a proxy indicator for routine immunization coverage.

² The initial baseline data are based on the WHO/UNICEF Joint Reporting Form.

Reward phase

After the investment phase, continued support is dependent on a country's performance in meeting targets. During this second phase, funding is based on a system of rewards for each additional child immunized with DTP3 over and above the previous year. This is calculated on the basis of:

- In year one of the reward phase, US\$20 for each additional child immunized with DTP3 over and above the original target for the number of additional children to be immunized with DTP3 in the first year after GAVI approval.
- In years two and three of the reward phase, US\$20 for each additional DTP3-immunized child compared with the previous year.

In order to receive the rewards, countries are required to pass an independent data quality audit (DQA) – ensuring that at least 80% of the country-reported data on immunization coverage correspond with the audited data.

Progress so far

GAVI has so far disbursed US\$73.7 million in ISS support through The Vaccine Fund to 52 countries (as of December 2004). A recent evaluation³ of ISS funding found that of 33 ISS-funded countries which received early funding, 23 had succeeded in increasing the number of DTP3-immunized children by 2003, although in six countries this was accounted for by population growth. The study, which recommended the continuation of ISS funding, also declared that the complete flexibility of ISS funding was its most valuable characteristic – allowing countries to use the funds when and where they are needed most to strengthen health systems and improve immunization performance.

³ Evaluation of GAVI Immunization Services Support Funding, Abt Associates Inc, Bethesda, MD, USA, 2004.