

Annex B: PNG no cost extension

Section A: Summary

This paper requests the Gavi Board support for a no-cost extension (NCE) of Gavi's tailored strategy for Papua New Guinea (PNG) until 31 December 2027, which includes financing for new vaccine support, and recommends an external evaluation of the tailored strategy in 2026. The latter would make recommendations about possible further Gavi support to PNG beyond 2027. Larger questions about transition will be addressed as part of the Gavi 6.0 Strategy and the associated Funding Policy Review.

PNG is part of the Fragile and Conflict (F&C) Segment and has been in Accelerated Transition since 2016. Despite its status as a lower middle-income country, Penta1 and Penta3 coverage in PNG is lower than the median of other F&C countries and is far below the mean of countries in Accelerated Transition. Both coverage rates are one third lower than what PNG achieved in 2013 and one half of what PNG achieved in 2005, suggesting that improvements should be attainable.

In June 2019 the Board approved a specially tailored strategy that extended PNG's Accelerated Transition Phase until December 2025. The 2020-2025 financial envelope is US\$ 60 million, accompanied by sustained amounts of targeted country assistance (TCA). All support was contingent upon fulfilment of key commitments in a PNG Accountability Framework.

COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) in January 2020 and this delayed implementation of the Gavi PNG Strategy. The Gavi Accountability Framework was agreed in March 2023 as part of the PNG's Full Portfolio Planning (FPP) proposal. The key actions agreed to were to: (i) increase vaccine financing; (ii) improve coverage rates; (iii) improve EPI staffing, (iv) strengthen coordination and oversight; and (v) increase the use of data for decision making. The country is progressing against vaccine financing and coverage rate targets but it is too early to assess progress on other indicators. The first formal progress review will occur in Q1 2024. Gavi's Accountability Framework fits into the more comprehensive Health Accountability Framework that donors, partners and National Department of Health (NDOH) are working on together to strengthen NDOH's overall lead role for the health sector.

To improve coverage rates and reduce the number of zero dose children, the Government, as part of its 2022 National Health Strategy, and NIS plans to: (i) introduce at least 2,000 village health assistants that would help increase coverage; (ii) expand outreach and fixed site immunisation delivery in zero dose targeted areas through the jointly financed DFAT, MFAT and Gavi, AIHSS program (which targets provinces, mostly through direct CSO support, that have relatively strong Primary Health Care delivery systems while supporting other provinces with weaker structures); (iii) strengthen data reporting and utilization by training provincial data focal points on eNHIS data validation and introduction and (iii) address key human resource issues such as optimizing the provincial and district health structures and increasing the number of village health assistants to a total of approximately 6,000 in

subsequent years. The Government also wants to test the introduction of HPV in Western Highlands. Gavi Alliance partners, including the Global Fund, are keen to support PNG to introduce proven health systems uptake, such as increasing the support to faith-based organisations to deliver immunization and other PHC services. Gavi and Global Fund are advocating, with other partners, for a long term self-sustained national health budget allocation that ensures PNG's self-financing of medical supplies (including vaccines) in the coming years.

Demand generation and gender related immunization activities in a country with a wide variety ethnic group becomes a priority for the next years. Human centered designed approaches to enhance community engagement and address gender related barriers in collaboration with partners such as UNICEF, UNFPA and DFAT are under development to strengthen vaccine uptake.

National and provincial technical assistance will be supported through PEF-TCA funding. These targeted TA investments will improve vaccine promotion in under immunized communities, as well as guarantee stable support to provinces, through full time regional immunization specialist working with community leaders, health workers and provincial authorities.

Providing an NCE would allow the Government to implement its reform agenda, respond to a specific government request, and increase predictability of financing. An external evaluation in 2026 could provide the basis for longer-term strategy for support to PNG.

Section B: Review of the Strategy for Papua New Guinea

1. Background and context

PNG contains 10,000 ethnic clans spread across 600 islands. Much of the country is rugged mountainous terrain with few roads. The economy is dominated by extractive industries with a GNI per capita was US\$ 2,730 in 2022 and has been growing steadily since 2015. Since 2022 PNG has been fully financing Pentavalent, PCV and MR vaccines.

Health systems remain fundamentally weak and health outcomes poor. Most provinces (14 out of 22 or 63.6%) had fewer than one health facility per 10,000 population making access to basic health services a major challenge. In 2022 Penta1 and Penta3 coverage was the second lowest globally.

While coverage rates have declined from 2005 (table 1), there are some bright spots. For example, the Advanced Immunization Health System Strengthening Program (AIHSS) helped increase the number of doses distributed. Comparing the period 2018/19 (pre-project) to 2020/21 the number of doses of Penta 1, Penta 3 and MR1 have increased on average 18%, 23% and 48% in AIHSS targeted provinces. On the contrary non-AIHSS provinces have had a decrease of -7%, -7% and -5% respectively.

Table 1: Penta1 and Penta3 Coverage (%) in PNG compared to the median of Fragile/conflict countries and countries currently in Accelerated Transition

Vaccine	Group	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Penta 1	PNG	84	80	70	62	64	46	44	44	48	39	45
	Fragile/conflict	66	77	80	76	76	77	78	78	78	78	79
	Accelerated transition	69	71	77	72	78	79	82	83	81	81	81
Penta 3	PNG	59	72	55	49	46	36	35	35	39	31	36
	Fragile/conflict	50	63	70	66	67	68	68	70	68	67	69
	Accelerated transition	58	63	72	65	72	72	76	78	75	75	75

Source: WUENIC Data 2022

2. Rationale for NCE until end 2027

An NCE for PNG would: (i) respond to a specific Government request and allow implementation of the **National Health Plan**, a new **National Immunisation Strategy**, and the Gavi **FPP**; (ii) allow the recruitment and deployment of key workers such as Village Health Assistants in the least performing areas; and (iii) provide predictability about support to allow the Government and other partners to design their health sector investments.

In a recent Gavi mission to PNG, the Health Development Partner Group discussed the need to finalize the “Overall Health Accountability Framework” aimed to identify gaps and provide necessary technical assistance to the NDOH to help strengthen its ability to undertake its lead role at the central level coordinating body and to be able to engage meaningfully at the subnational level with the Provincial Health Authorities all with the aim of increased immunisation coverage and decreasing the numbers of zero dose and under-immunised children.

3. Proposed Gavi engagement in PNG

It is proposed to extend the Accelerated Transition period for PNG until December 2027. Any engagement beyond 2027 would depend on progress made on commitments in the Accountability Framework. The NCE would allow use of the remaining US\$ 25.5 million, including US\$ 12.8 million for new vaccines support/campaigns, left from the original US\$ 60 million agreed by the Board in June 2019. There will also be sustained levels of TCA until 2027.

Section C: Actions requested of the Gavi Alliance Board

The Gavi Secretariat requests to the Gavi Alliance Board that it:

- a) **Approves**, as part of the tailored strategy to approve the no-cost extension request made by the Government of PNG to the Gavi Alliance Board in May 2023, that **PNG be exceptionally granted a no-cost extension of the country's US\$ 60 million 2019 funding envelope from December 2025 to December 2027.**
- b) **Recommends** an external review of the PNG strategy be conducted in 2026.