Impact Outlook

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- 'With sustained attention and commitment, we are optimistic that global efforts on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) will yield new and novel antibiotics, as well as generate improvements to treatment regimens and new strategies to prevent further spread of drug resistance'

Keeping the global health R&D wheel turning

*As Director of Global Health Technologies Coalition (GHTC), a group of 25 non-profit organisations working together to advance health policies and accelerate the creation of new drugs, vaccines and diagnostics, **Jamie Bay Nishi** is all too aware of the importance of collaboration. Here she discusses how through collaboration, they are advancing policies to harness the potential of innovation to bring health and wellbeing within reach for all*

Could you talk a little about the collaborative nature of the GHTC?

Collaboration is at the heart of what we do and is key to our success as an advocacy organisation. In developing our advocacy agenda and policy positions, we look to our membership and partners to draw on their deep, diverse expertise and experience to identify and develop common goals and messaging based on member-generated evidence. In driving forward this agenda, we leverage the networks of our members and partners to engage with various policy makers and technical bodies, as well as demonstrate the broad base of support for these issues.

Collaboration is also key to progress in global health R&D more broadly. Developing technologies to confront the world's most devastating diseases is a challenging and resource-intensive process that requires collaboration among multiple partners and sectors – including government, academia, multilateral institutions, non-profits and the private sector. These collaborative partnerships leverage resources, skills, and expertise of various R&D actors to ensure technologies transition from basic research to final products that are ultimately licensed and scaled-up so they reach patients in need.

Can you expand on any particularly successful alliances you have helped forge which have led to significant progress in R&D?

Building strong alliances to support an advocacy goal has been key to our success as a coalition. One of our first notable successes was securing greater support for R&D of new tools to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS in reauthorisation legislation for the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) – a landmark US programme to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic. GHTC helped convened partners to develop a shared proposal for legislative language, won over and enlisted other organisations to join this advocacy movement, and leveraged the network of our members and partners to meet with influential policy makers. Together, GHTC and a broader coalition succeeded in expanding PEPFAR's focus from scaling up existing HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention tools to also providing support for the development of new and improved technologies.

More recently, GHTC helped convene an alliance of partners to push for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' targets and evaluation indicators to recognise the importance of health R&D and new technologies in achieving health and wellbeing for all. By working together to generate analysis and leveraging partner networks to reach key decision-makers in the US and other member states, GHTC and partners helped secure an R&D-focused target and indicator in the Sustainable Development Goals framework. This ensures progress in R&D will be measured and tracked so we can gauge whether we are on pace to develop and deliver the next generation of health technologies needed to reach our global goals.

Are there any institutions you would like to see joining the coalition?

We have always felt it is important to have a wide range of perspectives represented within our coalition's membership. From the start, GHTC worked to build a broad membership base from across the non-profit global health and health research fields. This includes actors who are directly engaged in global health R&D – such as non-profit product development partnerships (PDPs) who develop and roll out technologies; to implementation and

In her role as director of GHTC, Jamie Bay Nishi manages the coalition's engagement with members and other stakeholders and partners in government, the private sector and civil society. She previously served as Managing Director of Devex LIVE at Devex, a media platform for the global development community.

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GHTC global health technologies coalition

Photo: PATH/Aaron Joel Santos

organisations comprised of experts in medical research, infectious diseases and global health. Not only does this range of members ensure we truly represent the voice of the global health R&D community, but it also enhances the coalition's understanding of the intricacies of the global health and R&D fields, enabling the coalition to pursue policy solutions that really move the needle in global health R&D.

In the years ahead, we hope to continue to grow our membership and reach, while maintaining our goal of having a diverse and broad coalition. We also recognise that the world's health challenges are too great for any one sector alone to solve and multisector partnerships will be critical to accelerating progress. We are also interested in building strategic partnerships with a variety of other R&D stakeholders from among the non-profit, academic and private sectors to foster even stronger and broader alliances to achieve our advocacy goals.

What obstacles have you faced in terms of integrating and uniting such an international group of members?

Our power as a coalition is rooted in the variety of organisations we represent and the deep and varied scientific expertise and perspectives they bring, depending on where they work and the intricacies of their particular research or health focus areas. We consider the diversity of thought to be a value, rather than a hindrance to our work. Our role as the coalition secretariat is to tap into this deep reservoir of knowledge among our membership and unleash their thinking to find the best policy solutions to address the many complex issues that impact global health product development. To do this, we create a space for members and other stakeholders to come together, share knowledge, find areas of consensus and ultimately unite around a core advocacy platform and carry forward a clear and unified message. This process can take time and can sometimes be messy in the middle, but we know that ultimately we'll end up with a policy platform that is stronger, more durable and more likely to generate the solutions needed to advance global health research.

How do you see R&D generally developing in the future?

The future of global health R&D will be rooted in partnerships. The world's most pressing global health challenges are too great to be solved by any one sector or government alone. Multi-sector partnerships that leverage the resources, skills and expertise of governments, civil society and the private sector are essential for advancing the research, development, scale-up and rollout of

In addition to technology development, capacity building and technical exchange, a key area of partnerships will need to be around financing. It's been well documented that today there is a significant gap between the need for new global health technologies and the current levels of investment in R&D. To continue progress, that gap must be filled. In our interconnected world, diseases know no borders, and as incomes rise around the world, disease burdens are growing and shifting. There is mutual interest in finding solutions to global health challenges, and there must be mutual commitment. As the economies of low- and middle-income countries grow, we see potential for these nations to play a greater role in funding and conducting research to address their own health needs. Ongoing efforts to establish new, innovative incentive and financing mechanisms also hold great potential to spur greater investment in R&D from the private sector and non-traditional investors. New partnerships for financing to support R&D are critical for accelerating the pace of scientific discovery.

With recent Ebola and Zika outbreaks, coupled with an international commitment to the Global Health Security Agenda, we're also seeing a global focus on strengthening health systems to prevent, detect and respond to disease threats, as well as growing recognition of the critical need to have vaccines, drugs, diagnostics and other technologies developed in advance of an emergency to prevent outbreaks from becoming epidemics. Scientists and policy makers alike are exploring new approaches to more quickly develop and test vaccines and other tools against emerging diseases – including novel platform vaccine technologies using RNA – as well as pioneering new models to conduct clinical trials during an outbreak and rapidly scale up manufacturing capabilities to ensure technologies can be deployed quickly during a crisis. This work could generate new understanding and interventions that will improve our preparedness for future epidemics and create new and innovative approaches to technology development.

Over the last decade, we've also seen antimicrobial resistance (AMR) pose a growing threat to health progress. In the last few years, we've seen increased scientific and political focus on advancing solutions to confront this challenge. With sustained attention and commitment, we are optimistic that global efforts on AMR will yield new and novel antibiotics, as well as generate improvements to treatment regimens and new strategies to prevent further spread of drug resistance.