Advocacy toolkit

This document serves as a guide to engaging your government in improving rabies control efforts. It will be particularly useful to:

- those working in the field of rabies control seeking to increase the priority given to rabies control by governments,
- government employees wanting to increase departmental commitment to existing or planned rabies prevention programs, and
- non-profit organizations working towards policy change and implementation at a local or national level.

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Introduction

“I would argue that the largest hurdle to the elimination of dog and human rabies lies in the lack of political priority and will”

Professor Louis Nel
Executive Director, GARC

Rabies cases in people are entirely preventable, and there is sufficient evidence that the disease can be eliminated from dogs, even in resource-poor countries. The “Rationale for Investing in the Global Elimination of Dog-Mediated Human Rabies”, developed by the WHO, FAO, OIE and GARC, sets out a clear case that investment in rabies control is a public good and that governments need to increase their efforts to make global elimination a reality. At the core of the successful implementation efforts around the globe is the political will to make it happen. Without the political will, it is unlikely that the necessary resources will be made available to sustainably reduce the public health burden of rabies.

In December 2015, a global meeting organised by the WHO, OIE, FAO and GARC agreed to the vision of zero human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030 and launched a global framework to realise it. This major step has put rabies elimination on the global agenda and can be used to inform your advocacy efforts.

Tools have been specifically designed to support countries as they develop their elimination strategies. These are being used by international organisations through regional networks of rabies experts, to build capacity to deliver rabies control interventions at scale. A global advocacy campaign is underway to influence policy makers and funders.

There is a growing momentum, and it is an exciting time to be advocating for dog-mediated rabies elimination. This document provides ideas and strategies to help you.

How to prepare and conduct your campaign

First you need a set of clear objectives: What are you trying to achieve? It is vital that your objectives are relevant and realistic.

Most countries are members of global and regional organisations whose mandates include rabies control. In these cases, government representatives have already committed to international human health and animal health standards, resolutions and calls to action (appendix 1). These now need to be followed up at the national level.

Your campaign objectives need to be based on your country’s specific circumstances. Some possible areas within which you can design an objective are to:

- Make rabies a notifiable disease (in humans and animals) in your country (essential for monitoring outbreaks)
- Encourage the government to use existing mechanisms to keep rabies high on the international agenda (e.g. write a letter to WHO)
- Include bite prevention and rabies awareness in the school curriculum
- Promote World Rabies Day as a means of increasing disease awareness and promoting preventative measures (such as dog vaccination and bite wound management).
- Adhere to existing regional/international resolutions – see Appendix 1.
Invest in capacity building programs for human and animal health systems with FAO, OIE and WHO guidance and support.

Call for enforcement of existing national legislation or ordinances on rabies and responsible dog ownership.

Review or elaborate a national/provincial rabies control strategy with specific milestones.

Create a rabies task-force involving all relevant stakeholders, including representatives of affected communities – this could be at the local, provincial or national level.

Increase the effectiveness of surveillance and reporting of rabies incidence, both for human and animal rabies.

Improve timely and affordable access to Post-Exposure Prophylaxis for those most at risk.

Increase capacity so that 70% of dogs are vaccinated (to achieve herd immunity).

Improve coordination between relevant sectors – human health, animal health, and education – to strengthen rabies prevention awareness and procedures.

You can also refer to the Rabies Blueprint¹ for more detailed aspects of program implementation, and further legislative and funding objectives.

**Working together**

Join forces with other organizations to increase your impact. Consider approaching groups outside your specific interest - you may find allies in unexpected places.

Rabies affects human health, animal health and welfare, wildlife conservation, and tourism. Many families have to go into debt to pay for essential post-exposure prophylaxis treatment and lose income from lost days at work.

International organisations such as the WHO, FAO and OIE have regional and country offices. They are a very good example of organisations working together across sectors to end rabies, and this example can be followed whatever your level. Consider building collaborations among veterinary and medical associations, public health, children’s and animal welfare NGOs. You could also include social workers and development groups and ask international organisations for technical support - the collaborators will vary depending on your situation.

**Approaching the government**

The success of your campaign rests largely with approaching the right people at the right time. Rabies prevention often falls under the remit of more than one department/ministry and successful rabies prevention relies on their collaboration based on a shared vision.

Consider contacting people who are responsible for, or have an interest in, public health, animal health, and education, including:

- ministers or other high-ranking government representatives in the relevant departments
- provincial governors
- opposition party spokespeople

¹ [http://caninerabiesblueprint.org/Infrastructure-legislative](http://caninerabiesblueprint.org/Infrastructure-legislative)
Once you have identified who you want to contact, you need to work out how you are going to reach them. For the best chance of success, use your professional and personal networks. Start with who you know and ask: Who do they know? An introduction can be far more effective than trying to contact them directly. However, it is worth trying all avenues, including the direct approach.

**Setting up a meeting**
Securing face-to-face time is important to ensure your message is taken seriously. This can be challenging as key people are always in demand and under pressure.

A draft letter is in appendix 3 for you to modify and use. Remember to tailor each letter to the individual recipient focusing on facts relevant to his/her responsibilities or interests. For example, the Health Minister is more concerned with protecting human health, whereas the Agriculture Minister or chief veterinary officer is usually responsible for animal ownership and dog vaccination campaigns.

If you do not have a response to your letter within a set timeframe, follow up with a telephone call. If you continue to get no response ask yourself if this is the right person. And, if so, is there some other way you can approach him/her?

To get results it is important to persist but this can be a delicate process. Push too hard and you risk annoying your subject. Be too reticent and you risk being ignored. Either way, it may be useful to involve the media. See the Using the Media section below.

**Preparing for the meeting**
Have a specific objective in mind for the meeting. What do you want from the meeting? This may be the overall campaign objective or an intermediary step toward it.

Before the meeting, you may wish to consider the different issues that could come up and practise your answers, along with a summary of the main points that you want to deliver at the meeting.

Know your facts. It is always impressive if you can respond accurately to any questions so carry supporting documents with you, including copies that you can leave behind. (Appendices 1, 2 and 4 provide some useful supporting information.)

If you are asked a question to which you do not know the answer, do not make something up. Instead, offer to research and follow up - this can be a useful way to continue the dialogue.

**Using the Media**

*Tell a Story*
We all respond to stories, and case studies can be particularly powerful in highlighting how national issues affect individual lives. Collect stories with photos to illustrate your points and use these in your communications with government, the media, and on social media. You may also be able to use them for fundraising.

*Traditional media*
The media often influence public opinion and thereby political will.

Celebrate positive engagement from your government by issuing joint press releases around your common goals and achievements.
If, on the other hand, you feel your government could do more, engage media to raise public awareness around the issues and the realistic measures your government can and should take to reduce the incidence of rabies. Develop a network of journalists who are sympathetic to your aims and provide them with good stories, photos and other resources. Celebrities can also be recruited to raise awareness.

Remember to link your media communications to specific government priorities and your campaign objectives. More detailed information on how to deal with the media including how to write a press release and hold a press conference is available in the Communications Toolkit.

**Social media**

Use social media to link to others with similar goals and to publicize your campaign. Again, see the Communications Toolkit for more information. Where relevant, use feedback from social media in your communications with the media and government.

Regularly ask your followers to help your campaign by completing specific tasks, for example

- signing an online petition
- reposting your posts to their network
- writing or emailing government ministers to back up your calls for action (see appendix 3 for a draft)

GARC can also support your social media efforts. Link to us on Facebook (GlobalAllianceforRabiesControl) and/or Twitter (@rabiesalliance) and we will like, share or retweet where appropriate.

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2At [http://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/publicizing-your-event/](http://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/publicizing-your-event/)
Appendix 1 – Rabies resolutions and calls to action

Below is a list of existing resolutions and calls to action which you could refer to in your campaign.

Global

The WHO, OIE, FAO, and GARC endorsed the vision of zero human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030 worldwide and launched a global framework to achieve this vision.

- Global Framework for the Elimination of Dog-Mediated Human Rabies

The WHO classes rabies as a “Neglected Tropical Disease”. The United Nations summit adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. UN Sustainable Development Goal 3.3 aims to end neglected tropical diseases by 2030.

- WHO (2013). Resolution WHA66.12 on Neglected Tropical Diseases. World Health Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland
  http://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/en/

Regional

- ASEAN Rabies Elimination Strategy (2014)
  http://www.searo.who.int/entity/emerging_diseases/links/Zoonoses_SFEHRDT-SEAR.pdf


This list is not exhaustive. If you know of other resolutions that might be relevant please get in touch at campaigns@rabiesalliance.org.
**Appendix 2 – Tools and Platforms**

**World Rabies Day**
September 28 is celebrated every year as World Rabies Day. Use World Rabies Day as a hook for your campaign. It is a fantastic opportunity to run awareness and dog vaccination campaigns, and build media interest around rabies issues in your country. There are lots of other ideas available on our website, many of which are very low cost.

Encouraging your government to support and take part in World Rabies Day raises awareness at all levels of society.

[https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/](https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/)

**End Rabies Now**
The End Rabies Now campaign aims to significantly raise the profile of rabies as a global neglected tropical disease. The campaign’s mission is to galvanise global support and funding for ending human deaths from canine-mediated rabies by 2030. Encourage your government to take steps towards meeting the 2030 elimination date.

[www.endrabiesnow.org](http://www.endrabiesnow.org)

**Canine Rabies Blueprint**
The Blueprint is a free, online detailed guide for countries that want to prevent human rabies by eliminating canine rabies within their borders. It enables ministries and other interested parties to help themselves through the process of designing, implementing and evaluating a large scale rabies control program. The Blueprint is a single point of reference with links to best practice techniques, published literature, international guidelines and less formal case studies providing practical examples of solutions to rabies control issues.

[www.caninerabiesblueprint.org](http://www.caninerabiesblueprint.org)

- An essential component of the Canine Rabies Blueprint, the Stepwise Approach towards Rabies Elimination (SARE) serves as a self-assessment tool to measure progress of a country towards rabies elimination and provides steps to move towards this goal in a systematic manner.

[http://caninerabiesblueprint.org/A-stepwise-approach-to-planning](http://caninerabiesblueprint.org/A-stepwise-approach-to-planning)
Appendix 3 – Draft letter asking for a meeting with a government official

Dear [xxx – insert name written by hand]

You will be aware that rabies is a devastating disease that causes unspeakable physical suffering to affected people and animals before they die. Post-exposure prophylaxis (the essential course of vaccines which prevents onset of the disease after exposure to the virus) costs [insert cost in your country] – a price that those most at risk find hard to pay. And, on top of that, fear of the disease causes animal cruelty. But rabies is 100% preventable, through canine vaccination and public education.

I am writing to you to request a meeting to discuss how [insert name of your group] can support the government to [insert objective e.g. increase participation in World Rabies Day, develop a national elimination strategy, etc.]

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 4: Facts about rabies

Use this document to support your call for better rabies prevention when contacting your political representative.

Is rabies still a problem?
Yes. Although well controlled in some countries, at least one billion people live at risk of rabies every day and the latest estimates suggest that around 59,000 people, many of them children, die of rabies around the world each year.

95% of the world's human victims of rabies are from Africa and Asia and almost all cases are the result of a bite from an infected dog.

Within those countries it is the poorest and most marginalized people who suffer most. They are least able to access life saving vaccines if they are bitten. And the struggle to pay for treatments often deepens their already desperate poverty.

Why should the goal be eliminating canine rabies?
Safe and effective vaccines can be used to prevent rabies before, or even after, people are exposed to a rabid animal. However, human vaccines are costly, and not always available to everyone, everywhere, every time.

The best answer is to tackle the disease at source. Vaccinating dogs creates a protective barrier around humans and their animals.

Freedom from the burden of canine rabies is a recognized global public good.

Can canine rabies be eliminated?
Yes. Countries across Western Europe, North America and a few countries in Asia have achieved this. More recently, huge strides have been made across Latin America, with canine rabies cases reduced by 98% and left in only a few hotspots. Smaller projects in Africa and Asia show that canine rabies can be brought under control in resource poor areas too.

The tenets of rabies control are clear. Mass vaccination campaigns that reach over 70% of dogs in an area eliminate canine rabies from that area. Time and again, arbitrary dog culling without vaccination has been shown to be ineffective and costly.

What is required?
All the technical tools required to free the world of canine rabies already exist. Collaboration between medical and veterinary sectors is vital for the development and funding of an integrated control program to protect people and dogs. Political will and international cooperation within regions are needed, and the development of regional strategies for rabies control shows that this is beginning to happen.

There are many instances where external funding injections have triggered rabies control programs, mainly through mass dog vaccination. However, for sustainability, long term financial and infrastructure support by governments is critical.

The Latin America example shows that where there is political will, long term financial commitment, and international cooperation, success follows.
Is there support for this?
Yes. The main organizations involved in rabies control at the global level (FAO, OIE, and WHO, along with GARC) are providing leadership and are committed to the global elimination of human deaths from rabies by 2030.

Regional networks such as the Pan-African Rabies Control Network are providing governments with tools and platforms to support their efforts towards rabies elimination.

Under GARC’s World Rabies Day campaign, thousands of people from international organizations to members of the public have organized events to sensitize and educate people about canine rabies and call for more action to be taken globally.

Can we afford it?
Yes, it would save money. In the long term, dog rabies vaccination campaigns combined with human vaccine provision are much cheaper than spending money only vaccinating exposed people.

Dog vaccination programs are proven as cost-effective at protecting humans, even if the goal is not elimination.

Can we afford not to eliminate canine rabies?
No. Continued presence of canine rabies sustains inequality and considerable socio-economic losses. Around 59,000 of the world’s poorest people are dying every year of a terrifying and entirely preventable disease.

Economic losses due to rabies are currently estimated at USD 8.6bn a year of which USD1.7bn is spent on providing vaccines to exposed people alone.

The elimination of dog-mediated rabies is possible. It will save human lives, save billions in treatment costs, and enable communities to live at peace with their dogs.

Call to action needed: please [enter your call to action]