



World Health Organization zero draft pandemic treaty pushes for increased surveillance powers

Description

The World Health Organization (WHO) has released the latest zero draft of its international pandemic treaty which will give the unelected global health agency new sweeping surveillance powers if passed.

The treaty requires the WHO's 194 member states (which represent 98% of all the countries in the world) to strengthen the WHO's "One Health surveillance systems."

One Health is a WHO system that aims to "optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems" and "uses the close, interdependent links among these fields to create new surveillance and disease control methods."

The WHO's One Health fact sheet points to Covid-19 as one of the main reasons for expanding its One Health approach and states that it "put a spotlight on the need for a global framework for improved surveillance."

The draft treaty also orders WHO member states to strengthen surveillance functions for "outbreak investigation and control through interoperable early warning and alert systems."

Additionally, it requires member states to recognize the WHO as the "directing and coordinating authority on international health work, in pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, and in convening and generating scientific evidence, and, more generally, fostering multilateral cooperation in global health governance."

Although the draft treaty doesn't mention surveillance tools that were used during Covid, such as contact tracing, testing, and vaccine passports, the WHO has previously confirmed that it's a big supporter of vaccine passports. In the early stages of the pandemic, the WHO also lauded China's Covid response, which utilized intense digital surveillance, before changing its position and criticizing China's zero-Covid policy.

This draft treaty has been in the works since December 2021. A final report on the treaty is expected to

be presented to the WHO's decision-making body, the World Health Assembly (WHA), in May 2024.

If passed, this treaty will be adopted under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution — an article that allows the WHO to impose legally binding conventions on the WHO's 194 member states if two-thirds of the member states' representatives vote in favor of the conventions.

Unlike the lawmaking process in most democratic nations, where elected officials implement national law, this WHO process allows a small number of global representatives, often unelected diplomats, to impose international laws on all of the WHO's member states.

While some politicians have pushed back against this international pandemic treaty, it has the support of many powerful nations including the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Council (EC) (which represents 27 European Union (EU) member states).

This treaty is just one of the global surveillance proposals with ties to the WHO that is being pushed by influential global figures. At Business (B20) 2022, a summit of business leaders from Group of 20 (G20) countries, numerous countries agreed on a digital health passport that uses WHO standards. This digital health certificate will track whether people have been vaccinated or tested.

By Tom Parker

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