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## FIP STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE<sup>1</sup>

### Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health equity, and vulnerable patients and populations

25 May 2020

Addressing health inequities and inequalities is more urgent than ever as the world faces the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

FIP recognises that the impact of COVID-19 is closely linked to social determinants and will lead to increased vulnerability across communities, especially where there are underlying and existing problems.

Poor access to health care and basic services are factors that will increase vulnerabilities. Other factors include weak systems (health, social, governance), high dependence on informal economies, armed conflict and violence, and marginalised and underserved communities.

The FIP EquityRx programme provides a roadmap for a set of concerted actions towards equity in pharmacy and health. The programme emphasises the contribution of pharmacy towards a better and more inclusive civil society for all and the FIP Commitment to Equity, to be launched later this year, commits to these principles.

Recognising and identifying the patients and populations most vulnerable to COVID-19 is critical and urgent. It requires particular and additional protective strategies from governments and other stakeholders. Pharmacy can play an important role in addressing and alleviating these inequities, and in serving vulnerable patients and populations during this pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> *FIP Statement of Principle: A statement setting out the position of FIP in emergency situations or on a subject that has humanitarian implications internationally but may not be perceived as being directly related to pharmacy. (An example could be policies that should be applied by governments in relation to refugees.)*



### **Violence against women and children**

The increased violence against women and children reported worldwide has been labelled the “shadow pandemic”. Pharmacists and pharmacy workers on the frontline can help protect women and children from violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community pharmacies around the world have been engaging in initiatives that allow those experiencing violence to report their abusers covertly.

### **Marginalised, displaced and underserved communities**

Ethnic minorities, refugees and migrants, and people living in situations of informal economy are being particularly hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the highest fatality rates are often reported among them. Pharmacists and pharmacy workers play an important role in empowering informal caregivers to care for their communities and families, and the role of these caregivers is especially important in communities that are marginalised, displaced or underserved.

### **Low-resource settings**

In countries with fragile and under-resourced health systems, with insufficient health workforce capacity, infrastructure or equipment, it is paramount to optimise the use of the available resources. Optimisation could include strengthening public health, and strategies for primary health care and disease prevention, in order to reduce the pressure on hospitals and healthcare teams. Community pharmacists and pharmacies should be recognised and harnessed in country-level strategies that prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and other communicable diseases.

Crucial preventive strategies for COVID-19 and many other communicable diseases include essential access to both personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand-washing facilities. In areas and populations with limited access to PPE or hand-washing facilities, pharmacists may assist in both distributing PPE and ensuring equitable access to it, in collaboration with health authorities, and in producing and dispensing quality hand sanitisers. They also play a key public health role by providing evidence-based advice on disease transmission, infection prevention and control measures, treatment options and



vaccines, and in patient triage, early recognition of cases and the adoption of appropriate measures.

### **Patients with underlying conditions**

Pharmacists support communities by ensuring the continuity of care of patients with underlying conditions and access to safe and quality medicines and their responsible use. At times when health system resources are stretched to their limits, it is essential to avoid increased pressure from other conditions, including non-communicable diseases, which are in themselves a factor contributing to increased vulnerability to COVID-19.

### **Older adults**

Finally, a key group of particularly vulnerable patients in all countries is older people. Ensuring continuity of care for the elderly (e.g., through home delivery of medicines and providing care by telephone), promoting and, where possible, administering vaccinations, preventing the onset of disease(s), managing diseases adequately, and optimising the use of medicines for the best possible outcomes are some of the services provided by pharmacists around the world to protect the health of this particular population.

Pharmacists across the globe reaffirm their commitment to serve patients and communities in all practice settings — community, hospital, clinical biology and others — throughout these challenging times of pandemic, and to promote equity in health protection and access to care by all people, especially the most vulnerable groups, and leaving no one behind.