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**TO:** ICANN Board of Directors, Board Chair Dr. Stephen Crocker and CEO Mr. Fadi Chehade

**Subject: Ensuring the future of health information online: multi-stakeholder call to support a suspension of ICANN's delegation of .health and new health-related Top Level domains**

Dear ICANN Board,

Currently, about a dozen health-related generic top-level domains (gTLDs) will be added to the Internet. They include domains such as .healthcare, .med, .doctor, .clinic and most importantly a new **.health**. ICANN is now in the process of awarding this hugely important domain space that could shape the very future of health information online to applicants/companies that have neither relevant interest nor expertise in public health. ICANN has ignored key stakeholders including the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Medical Association (WMA), Save the Children, the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA), the Health on the Internet (HON) Foundation, the International Society for Telemedicine & eHealth, countries (such as France and Mali), ICANN's Independent Objector and At Large Advisory Council (ALAC), European Union, and others who have expressed serious concerns about ICANN's lack of transparency and award process since 2012. Despite these objections, just last month, ICANN awarded the .health following a secret and private settlement between the applicants, making this an urgent global health policy issue and again raising questions about ICANN's level of transparency and public engagement, as well as about the Board's accountability to act in the public interest.

## **IMPORTANCE TO FUTURE OF HEALTH ONLINE**

As people in all countries increasingly use the "Health Internet" for important health-related information, decision making, and behavior change, the quality and trustworthiness of health information online has never been more important. A **.health** properly governed and managed, with meaningful oversight and participation from the medical/public health community, and structured as a global public good with proper policies, could have been a game changer for improving global public health and ensuring consumer safety worldwide. Instead, ICANN has prioritized commercial interests over the needs of public health and consumers everywhere despite previous and numerous objections/letters calling for a halt to its processes. This included

concerns raised by WHO's 194 Member States, who in 2013 issued a resolution calling for the health-related gTLDs to be "consistent with global public health objectives."

## **URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED**

In October 2014, ICANN's Board and Governmental Advisory Committee were directly informed about the public health community's ongoing concerns at its ICANN51 meeting during public interest consultations. In response to these concerns, ICANN's CEO, Fadi Chehade commented that ICANN was "aligned" with health concerns, but offered no tangible solutions other than referring the public health community to a newly hired regulatory officer. In contrast, and in what appears to be a direct denial of any obligation by ICANN for public accountability and stakeholder engagement on the issue, ICANN's Vice President for GDD operations, Christine Willett, responded to a recent letter from the WMA, IMIA, and HON Foundation that any health concerns should be brought up directly with future registry owners --not ICANN-- essentially absolving ICANN of any responsibility for the new health domains.

In response to this clear contradiction by ICANN's leadership and its continued inaction on the matter, we again call for urgent and tangible action. ICANN must immediately suspend the award and delegation of health-related domains until appropriate consultations can be held and measures agreed to protect public health and consumers.

As a broad and multi-stakeholder community of concerned Internet users, we call on the ICANN Board to immediately adopt the resolution of ICANN's own At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) unanimously recommending a "freeze" of the award/delegation of .health and other health-related domains (including in the 28 TLD strings identified by GAC requiring enhanced safeguards "Category1, Safeguards 1-8) pending further community review and subsequent changes to public interest provisions in TLD agreements (see:<http://www.atlarge.icann.org/correspondence/statement-public-interest-comments-16oct14-en.pdf>).

We call on ICANN's Board to act responsibly and to publicly acknowledge and respond to the widespread concerns of various organizations, the media, researchers, and the broader public health and Internet community worldwide regarding the .health and health-related domains. ICANN can accomplish this and meet its responsibilities to the public interest by immediately adopting the proposed ALAC resolution and suspending its delegation of health-related domains.

Yours sincerely,

## REFERENCES AND SOURCES

### Published articles:

- Mackey TK, Liang BA, Kohler J, Attaran A. [The Fight over dot-health: Ensuring the Future of Health Information Online](#). *The Lancet*. 2013; 382:1404.
- Eysenbach G. [The New Health-Related Top-Level Domains Are Coming: Will Cureforcancer.health Go to the Highest Bidder?](#). *J Med Internet Res*. 2014;16(3):e73.
- Mackey TK, Liang BA, Kohler JC, Attaran A. [Health Domains for Sale: The Need for Global Health Internet Governance](#). *J Med Internet Res*. 2014;16(3):e62.
- Mackey TK, Eysenbach G, Liang BA, Kohler JC, Geissbuhler A, Attaran A. [A Call for a Moratorium on the .health Generic Top-Level Domain: Preventing the Commercialization and Exclusive Control of Online Health Information](#). *Globalization and Health*. 2014; 10:62.
- Solomonides A, Mackey TK. Emerging Ethical Issues in Digital Health Information: ICANN, health information and the “dot health” top-level domain. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*: 2014; in press.

### News articles featuring research above:

- National Public Radio: (<http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2014/09/26/351416992/will-dot-health-make-it-more-likely-that-youll-get-scammed>)
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/health-websites-could-be-overrun-by-commercial-interests-experts-fear-1.2779128>)
- Inside Science (<http://www.insidescience.org/content/new-internet-domains-could-affect-public-health-say-experts/2176>)
- TechDirt (<https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20140926/08041428649/health-experts-issue-call-to-prevent-icanns-commercialization-new-health-domain-leading-to-exclusive-control-online-health.shtml>)
- Medical News Today (<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/releases/283165.php>)
- Kaiser Health News (<http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Daily-Reports/2014/September/29/health-IT.aspx>)
- Medpage (<http://www.medpagetoday.com/PracticeManagement/InformationTechnology/44766>)

### Links to letters/objections sent to ICANN:

- Joint letter from WMA, HON Foundation, IMIA (6 Oct 2014): <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/boyer-haikerwal-et-al-to-chehade-06oct14-en.pdf>
- Letter from HON Foundation (25 Dec 2013): <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/boyer-to-chehade-25dec13-en.pdf>
- Letter from WMA (11 Mar 2014): <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/kloiber-to-chehade-et-al-11mar14-en.pdf>

- Letter from International Society for Telemedicine & eHealth (11 Mar 2014):  
<https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/kwankam-to-crocker-et-al-11mar14-en.pdf>
- Letter from World Health Organization (16 May 2014):  
<https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/kieny-to-crocker-et-al-16may14-en.pdf>
- Letter from World Health Organization (11 Apr 2012):  
<https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/kieny-to-beckstrom-et-al-11apr12-en.pdf>