

VICH and a New Era *2024 Public Conference Outcomes*

Nearly 200 attendees from across the globe considered the future direction of technical cooperation in veterinary medicine during a 2-day gathering in Amsterdam

The 7th VICH (International Cooperation on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Veterinary Medicinal Products) Public Conference was held in Amsterdam on November 13-14, 2024 with the theme 'VICH and a New Era'. The event attracted close to 200 participants from all six continents, including experts, regulators and key stakeholders from both VICH and non-VICH countries. Attendees convened to share views, outline challenges, and consider how to improve the harmonization of veterinary medicines technical requirements and strengthen animal disease preparedness.

Overview of VICH and the Public Conference

VICH is an international cooperation programme that works to promote global availability of safe and effective veterinary medicinal products through the harmonisation of technical requirements for their registration. It was formed in 1996 with the strong support of WOAHA – World Organisation for Animal Health (ex OIE) and fosters a constructive dialogue among regulators and the veterinary pharmaceutical industry from member countries and observer countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

VICH hosts a public conference every five years to increase awareness of its work and invite new stakeholders to become engaged in its activities. These conferences improve attendees' knowledge of the global regulatory framework of veterinary medicines and build cooperation amongst regulatory agencies.

2024 Key Themes and Discussions

Several critical themes and key discussions shaped the two-day conference, including:

- **Value of cooperation:** Speakers underscored the importance of global cooperation through both VICH and regional mechanisms such as EAC and Zazibona in Africa. This work brings people together, builds trust and supports mutual recognition among regulatory bodies that can harmonise practices, reduce costs, and reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers. Ultimately, this helps increase availability and access to veterinary medicines across markets.
- **Regional cooperation and convergence:** Attendees stated that having access to a set of international guidelines provided the opportunity for cooperation between regions, leading to joint or simultaneous reviews of product applications across jurisdictions. Harmonised requirements were deemed vital steps to achieve the benefits of efficient use of limited resources through mutual reliance and increased regional collaboration. Regional VICH workshops could complement the global conference in the years ahead.
- **Reducing animal testing:** Regulators emphasized their commitment to the 3Rs and reducing animal testing. Speakers noted the added precision, increased

discriminatory power and reduced variability of in-vitro tests and called for a mindset shift towards recognizing these as the 'new' gold standard.

- **Global one health approach:** Speakers emphasized the role of veterinary stakeholders in the One Health initiative, a holistic approach connecting human, animal, and environmental health to tackle zoonotic disease threats and safeguard public health.
- **Supporting innovation:** Attendees considered the costs and challenges associated with bringing cutting-edge products like monoclonal antibodies to market, stressing the importance of closer international cooperation to enhance availability and accessibility. Speakers stressed that experience and sound science are critical before developing guidelines to avoid stifling emerging innovations.
- **Supporting quality:** a significant theme of the conference was the development of guidance to support good manufacturing practice, in full recognition of the high cost and waste of resources, to both inspectors and manufacturers, of duplicated manufacturing site inspections.
- **Pharmacovigilance:** The necessity for coordinated international monitoring of veterinary medicines' safety, quality, and efficacy was also discussed. Speakers highlighted efforts to move towards signal detection and management for improved in-market surveillance.

Call to Action: Increasing global cooperation for disease prevention

The conference reinforced that global partnerships are crucial to mitigating the rapid spread of zoonotic and animal diseases. Ensuring swift availability of vaccines for livestock and companion animals emerged as a pressing priority. Participants acknowledged that streamlined regulatory practices, including fast-track and conditional licensing are central to achieving these goals. Creating mechanisms for structured, regular dialogue between industry, regulators and policymakers was recognized as an important complementary tool. VICH provides this at an international level around the technical standards, while regulators would also benefit from an international forum to discuss regulatory challenges and approaches.

Looking Ahead

VICH has helped spread the benefits of regulatory harmonisation across the world since its inception in 1996. It will continue to develop and update its technical guidances, while also keeping an eye on the development of novel therapies and new technologies. The founding Members and Observers built a foundation that has now been shared across developed and developing regions through the VICH Forum that is enhancing access to veterinary medicines, which ultimately improves the health of animals, people and planet.

More Information

VICH has developed 61 technical guidelines and VICH expert working groups are working on several new guidelines and the revision of existing guidelines where necessary. VICH continues to address new scientific challenges. All VICH draft and final Guidelines are available on the VICH website at: www.vichsec.org. For more information, contact sec@vichsec.org.