

How WHO's Internship Policy Became More Inclusive

by DR ASHTON BARNETT-VANES

It's been a busy week at HAI, in which we've hosted events in [the Netherlands](#) (on alternative models of innovation) and the [United States](#) (on non-communicable diseases and access to insulin) , and seen the launch of an exciting new paper on the cost of production of insulin. But one of the highlights was the [coverage](#) of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) change of internship policy in order to boost access to those applying from low and middle-income countries (LMICs). This is a massively important intervention, that will have a lasting effect on LMIC Health Systems, where the WHO interns will use their experience in government agencies (such as ministries of health), procurement agencies and in domestic policy initiatives. The driving force behind the change was HAI network member, Ashton Barnett-Vanes, who writes here about his efforts and collaboration with HAI.

"Following a campaign initiated by my peers and I in 2012 after completing our internships at WHO, I had the opportunity to collaborate with many committed people over six years to raise awareness and push for a change in WHO policy on internships.

Between 2015 and 2018, I travelled to Geneva on seven occasions including attending five meetings of WHO's governing bodies as a HAI delegate. With 193 member states to engage and persuade, in 2017 HAI funded our team to post a letter to over 180 member states' Ministries of Health and Permanent Missions in Geneva. This mailshot raised awareness of the campaign, and it was from this correspondence that I was able to hold meetings leading to the establishment of a working group of states on internship programme reform.

This summer, I worked alongside this group of Geneva based diplomats from Algeria, Haiti, Jamaica, Mozambique and South Africa, supporting their bid to negotiate a resolution securing this change. On the 24th of May, 2018, 193 member states adopted this resolution at the World Health Assembly. It commits WHO, for the first time, to funding its interns and recruiting at least 50 percent of its 1000 annual participants from developing countries. I'm deeply grateful for the support of HAI over the last four years, without whom this change would not have taken place. I look forward to engaging further with the organisation in the years ahead."

Congratulations Ashton and good luck to all the future interns who will benefit from the change.