EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vaccines hold enormous potential for the control of infectious diseases and their costs. However, despite many significant accomplishments in vaccine development and immunization and clear evidence of their benefit and cost-effectiveness, the potential of vaccines to avert suffering and death remains underexploited both domestically and globally. Infectious diseases remain the leading cause of death worldwide, and many newly emerging or reemerging infections, such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and drug-resistant tuberculosis, threaten human health.

Vaccines need to be developed for many infectious diseases such as childhood pneumococcal and viral respiratory diseases, diarrheas, and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. Vaccines for other diseases, such as malaria, are especially needed for people in developing countries and for travelers to endemic areas. The use of all existing vaccines -- whether for children or adults -- needs to be improved. For example, in the United States, more individuals (or parents) need to seek vaccination, and health care providers need to avoid missing opportunities to vaccinate. New biotechnology approaches to making vaccines and new techniques for understanding pathogens and the human immune system already offer the opportunity, if they are applied energetically on a broad front, for there to be an unprecedented wave of vaccine development. Yet vaccine innovation, improvement, and progress in use remain slower than public health experts feel is desirable.

The process of disease prevention through vaccine research, development, licensure, manufacturing, and delivery to vaccines through the health system entails complex collaborative efforts between the many public- and private-sector participants at the various stages of the process. There has existed for some time the feeling that progress in disease prevention would be greater if ways could be found to bring greater cohesion to the individual activities of those participating in these efforts. In P.L. 99-660, Congress created the National Vaccine Program -- a cross-departmental, multi-agency collaboration led by the Public Health Service's National Vaccine Program Office (NVPO) -- as a vehicle for coordination and intervention to meet public health needs in the prevention of infectious diseases.

The National Vaccine Plan provides a framework -- including goals, objectives, and strategies -- for pursuing the prevention of infectious diseases under which Federal agencies, States, municipalities, and those in the private sector, such as vaccine companies and health care providers, can undertake their individual activities in a more coordinated manner. The plan also indicates how the United States can contribute to, and benefit from, global efforts in the prevention of infectious diseases. It identifies four goals responding to P.L. 99-660 and the National Vaccine Program's ultimate mission of preventing infectious diseases:

Goal 1: Develop new and improved vaccines;

Goal 2: Ensure optimal safety and effectiveness of vaccines and immunization;

Goal 3: Better educate the public and members of the health professions on the benefits and risks of immunizations; and

Goal 4: Achieve better use of existing vaccines to prevent disease, disability, and death.

The objectives related to these goals are shown in the accompanying summary table. The NVPO provides leadership, oversight, and coordination among Federal agencies.