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Infodemic Management News Flash

Thursday, 18 February 2021 | Issue #10

Feature Artwork

Almost a year ago to the day, much of the world was just wrapping its mind around the COVID-19 fundamentals, and trying to navigate the flood of information about it, when WHO's Director-General, Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus sounded the alarm that “we’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic.”

In February of 2020, the idea of infodemic management was far from mainstream. Global experts from multiple disciplines had yet to convene to tease out the nuances of the topic, yet to "discover the elephant" as the old Indian proverb (and Sam Bradd illustration) goes.

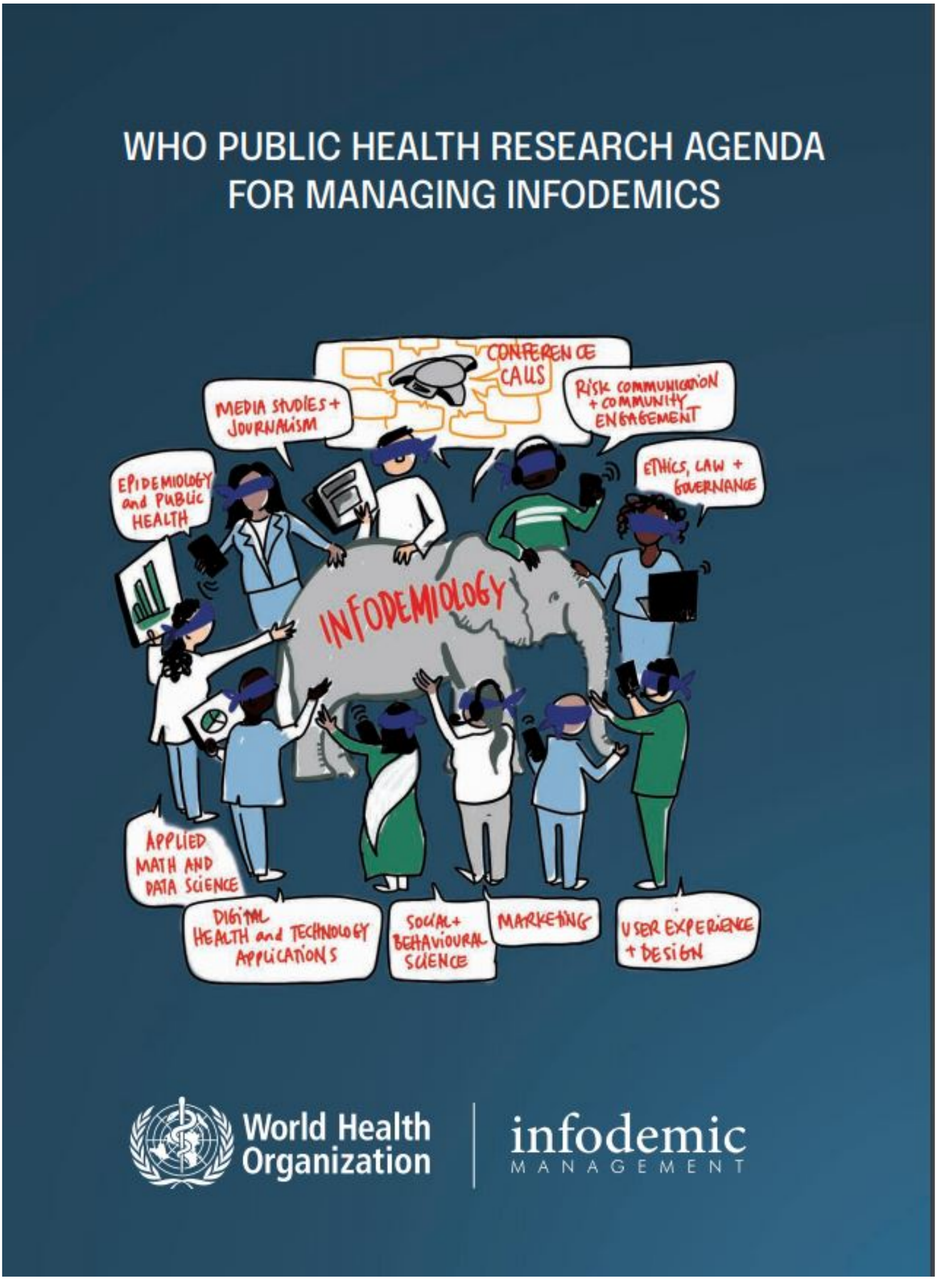
Fast forward to today. WHO and partners like you have scaled up this broad-reaching infodemic community and have spent a year mulling fresh ideas and launching a suite of tools to fight infodemics, including (but not limited to):

- The first, second and third WHO global infodemic management conference
- A global fact-checker database and network in collaboration with partners
- EARS, an AI-powered open-source social listening tool
- A public health research agenda to root the practice of infodemic management in evidence-based methodologies
- Launching the first infodemic management training program to upskill 270+ professionals from 75 countries who can deploy infodemic management strategies in countries
- A self-directed course for journalism on how to cover COVID-19 now and in the future
- Launching this gem of a publication—the WHO Infodemic Management News Flash—to keep the community abreast of updates
- Answering a call for papers—where six articles have just been published—to help improve understanding of and response to infodemics during public health emergencies
- Dozens of keynote addresses, panel discussions, webinars, podcasts and other platforms to discuss the nuances of infodemics and how to manage them

We know the work has only just begun, and the road ahead is long, but it is encouraging and motivating to see this community's progress to date.

Photo credit: 2020, Sam Bradd

Feature Content



WHO publishes public health research agenda for managing infodemics.

Many of you will remember that after WHO's initial infodemic consultation in April 2020, we organized a major infodemic conference in June and July where over 100 experts convened virtually to define the nascent science of infodemic management and build a public health research agenda that serves as a playbook for conducting relevant public health research.

This research agenda is now live! It provides guidance to invest in research and innovation so that we have better interventions and tools to understand, measure and respond to infodemics, and ultimately to steer people towards timely, accessible, understandable health information that can help them make good health choices.

Within the research agenda, five streams of thinking and 65 research questions were developed and prioritized so that the practice of infodemic management has a structure, a methodology that's rooted in evidence and has room to further evolve as a discipline.

This is exciting progress that will challenge country authorities to explore:

- How do overwhelming amounts of information affect behaviour in emergencies and what interventions are effective in addressing it?
- How does online behaviour affect offline action?
- How does the infodemic affect cognition and influence uptake of health services?
- How do policy interventions successfully address and mitigate health misinformation?

The next steps are to track implementation of the agenda and review evidence of its effectiveness. WHO is continuing its work with partners in developing the science of infodemiology and the practice of infodemic management, including new tools and techniques countries can deploy for emergency preparedness and response.

Click here for more information and to download the research agenda.

Health Security Releases Special Feature on Infodemics.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health has released a new special feature in the journal *Health Security*. This special feature is part of the WHO's joint call for articles on infodemics with five leading peer-reviewed journals in different fields, all related to the components of infodemics and infodemic management during public health emergencies.

The *Health Security* infodemics and health security special feature includes six original articles that address practice- and research-based analysis of misinformation during epidemics, characteristics of successful online messaging, disinformation and epidemics in the context of biowarfare, understanding the impact of different news sources on risk perception, and use of community listening and feedback to respond to false information. The three commentaries focus on the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of crisis and emergency risk communication, scientific situational awareness, and approaches to social media messaging.

You can find all the articles here:

- Using Community Feedback to Guide the COVID-19 Response in Sub-Saharan Africa: Red Cross and Red Crescent Approach and Lessons Learned from Ebola
- COVID-19 Echo Chambers: Examining the Impact of Conservative and Liberal News Sources on Risk Perception and Response
- Longitudinal Risk Communication: A Research Agenda for Communicating in a Pandemic
- Changes in the Scientific Information Environment During the COVID-19

Pandemic: The Importance of Scientific Situational Awareness in Responding to the Infodemic
- Disinformation and Epidemics: Anticipating the Next Phase of Biowarfare
- Going Viral: The 3 Rs of Social Media Messaging during Public Health Emergencies
- Responding to a Pandemic through Social and Behavior Change Communication: Nigeria's Experience

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Opportunities for Action

PHIRI
Population Health Information Research Infrastructure

Take a survey to help the Population Health Information Research Infrastructure (PHIRI) plan its European infodemic management course.

One of PHIRI's mandates is to identify best practices for handling the COVID-19 pandemic at the public health and clinical management level. This includes the COVID-19 response to the infodemic and health mis/disinformation.

To make progress towards this end, they've developed this survey for partners to help with two main objectives:

- To identify your needs regarding the infodemic response and related policies in your country and health system;
- To prepare accordingly to your needs an European infodemic Management course organized by PHIRI in collaboration with the WHO.

Here's a short video explaining the aim of the survey.

You can complete the survey here, and the deadline to complete the survey is 26 February.

Gain mastery over misinformation through First Draft's 30-minute workshops.

First Draft's flexible learning courses will keep you one step ahead of those spreading conspiracies and false claims about vaccines. The program is designed for those working on the frontline in the fight against misinformation. You can join as many online workshops as you wish. They're free, easy to access, and only take 30 minutes.

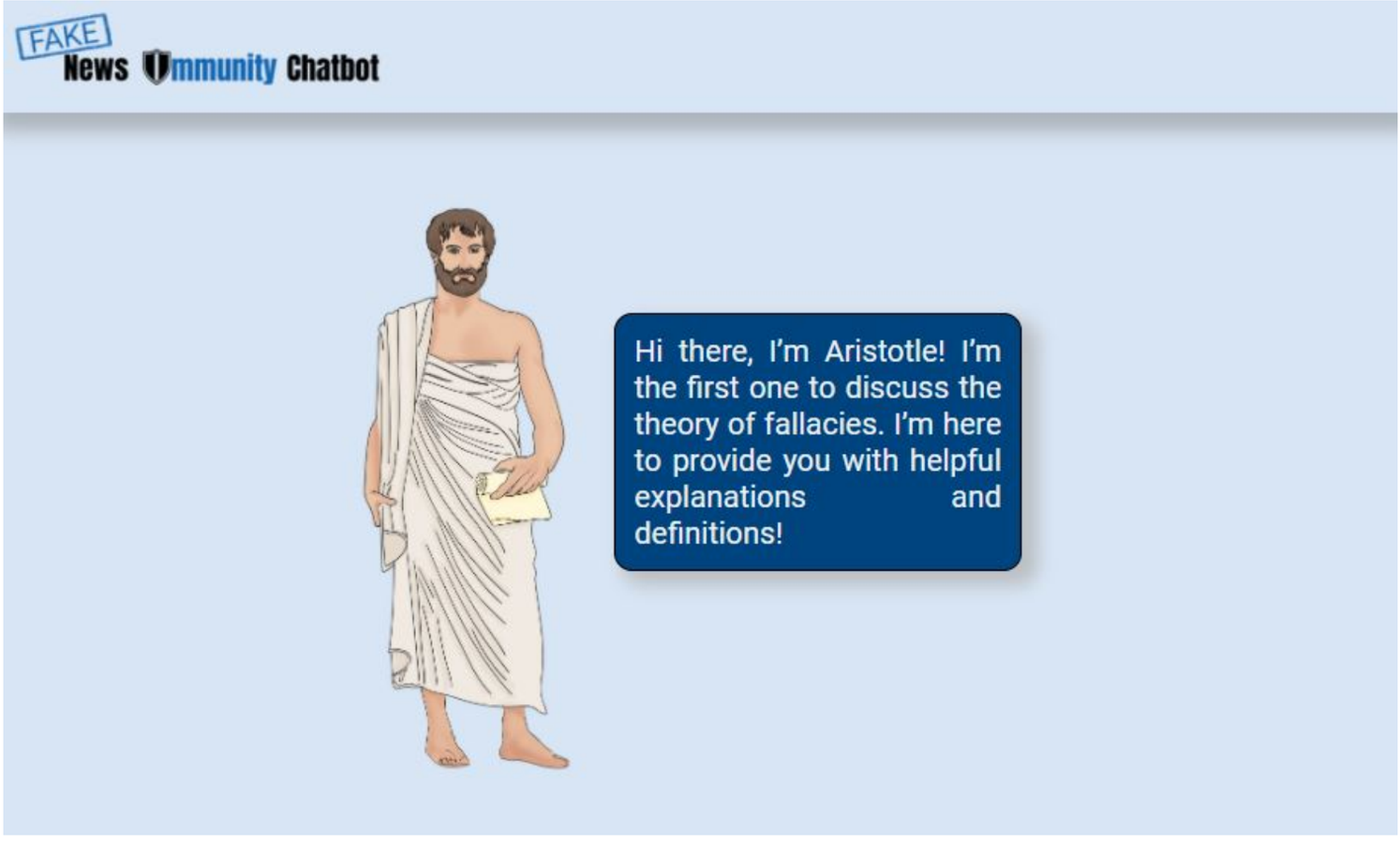
The courses take place from February - April and are available in nine languages and across three time zones:

- Tuesdays: AEDT (English, Mandarin and Hindi).
- Wednesdays: GMT (English, French, Arabic, Italian and German).
- Thursdays: ET (English, Spanish, and Portuguese).

Use some of new tools to help you identify and address misinformation.

The Public Health Agency of Canada's Sunday Edition suggests a few tools that can help you navigate and address the COVID-19 infodemic:

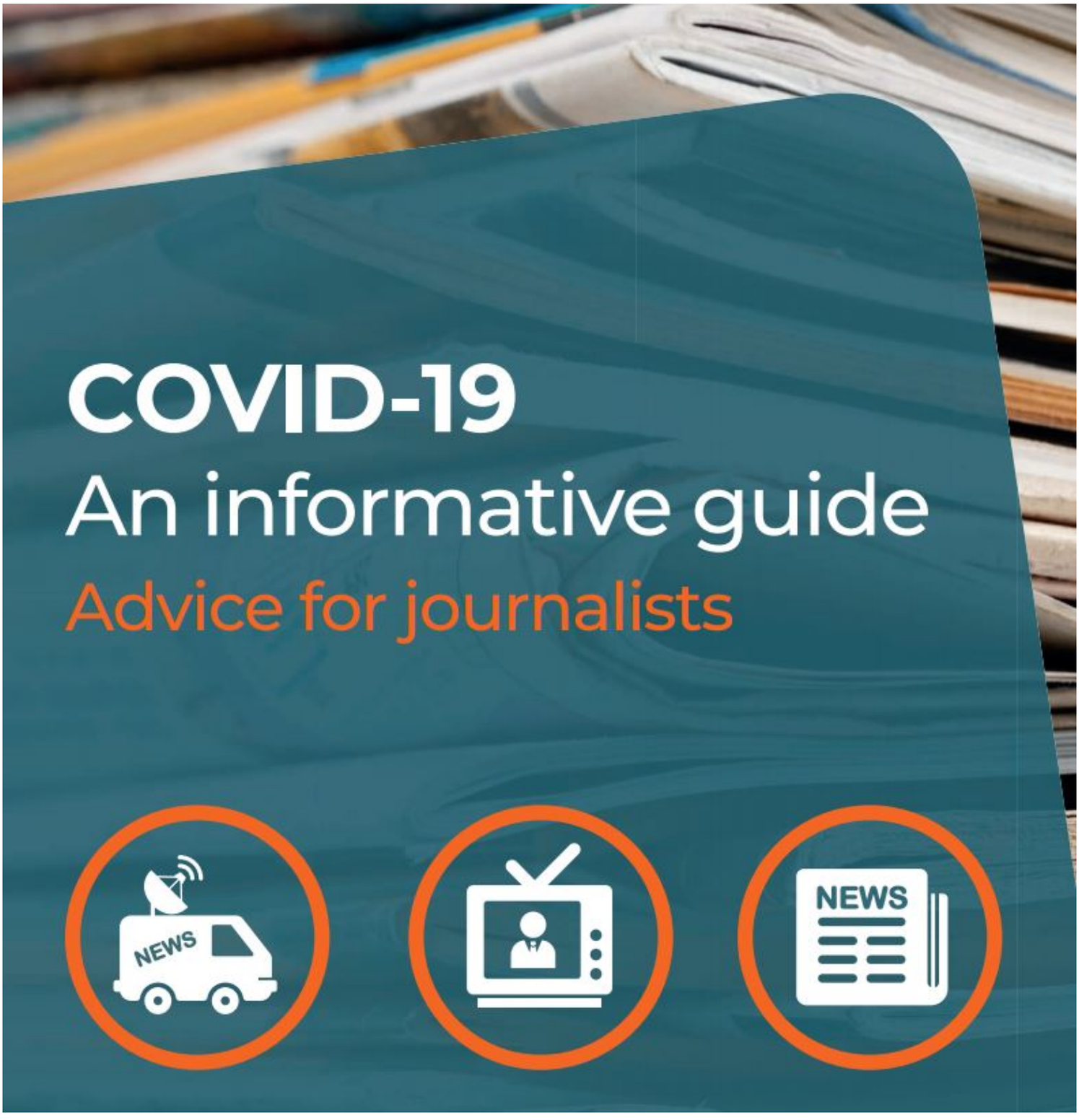
- SPOTFakeNews.ca: a tool to help you spot and stop misinformation in four simple steps
- ScienceUpFirst: social media movement developed by a team of independent scientists, health care providers and science communicators to stop the spread of misinformation around COVID-19
- MediaSmarts: a resource for parents, children and teachers to help introduce media literacy concepts to children



Join Socrates, Aristotle and Gorgias, your chatbots, who will challenge you on your misinformation identification skills.

The Fake News Immunity Chatbot will help you learn how to spot fallacies (arguments that appear to be valid but are not) in fake and semi-fake news stories. By answering questions from Aristotle, Gorgias, and Socrates, you will

learn how to approach a piece of news with a critical eye and how to be on the lookout for misleading or deceptive stories.



If you're a journalist, keep this guide on-hand.

This guide, originally developed by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), offers tools to help journalists practice responsible coverage of the pandemic using evidence-based information. It also proposes ways to approach coverage and encourages journalists to provide advice and solutions that can help reduce health risks and save lives.

Co-inform

Follow updates from Co-Inform on the progress of their plugin development.

During December 2020 and January 2021 Co-Inform carried out a round of evaluations for the their Citizens' Plugin which was developed to aid citizens' information evaluation practices during their day-to-day encounters with information on Twitter. The evaluation study took place across four countries: Austria, Cyprus, Greece and Sweden. A total of 80 participants took part in individual hour-long sessions and the data collected is currently being analysed.

Sign up to receive the Co-Inform newsletter so you can learn more about the projects they're developing, and visit their website to find lots of resources on tackling misinformation and building resilient societies.

Help your community take steps to prepare for a COVID-19 vaccine, treatment or new test.

Here you can find 10 well-established Risk Communication and Community

Engagement (RCCE) principles that have proven their power. Together they put communities at the heart of the rollout of new vaccines, treatments and tests and promote trust, the critical ingredient for all community action. Informed, engaged and empowered communities are the bedrock for the arrival of new vaccines, treatments and tests that will be introduced to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives.

Download this document here.

Job Opportunities

- **WHO:** Team Leader (WHO Health Emergencies) (Nepal)
- **UNICEF:**
  - Communication for C4D International Consultancy (Papua New Guinea)
  - Consultant (e) individuel (le) en Communication pour le Développement (Madagascar)
  - International Consultancy: Demand Generation support for RCCE to introduce COVID-19 Vaccine (Guinea-Bissau)
- **SSHAP:** Inaugural Social Scientist Fellowship Program in Low- and Middle-Income Countries
- **Sabin Vaccine Institute:** Senior Research Manager, Digital Media (Washington, DC)
- **Sciensano:** Junior Researcher - Building towards the European Health Data Space (Belgium)

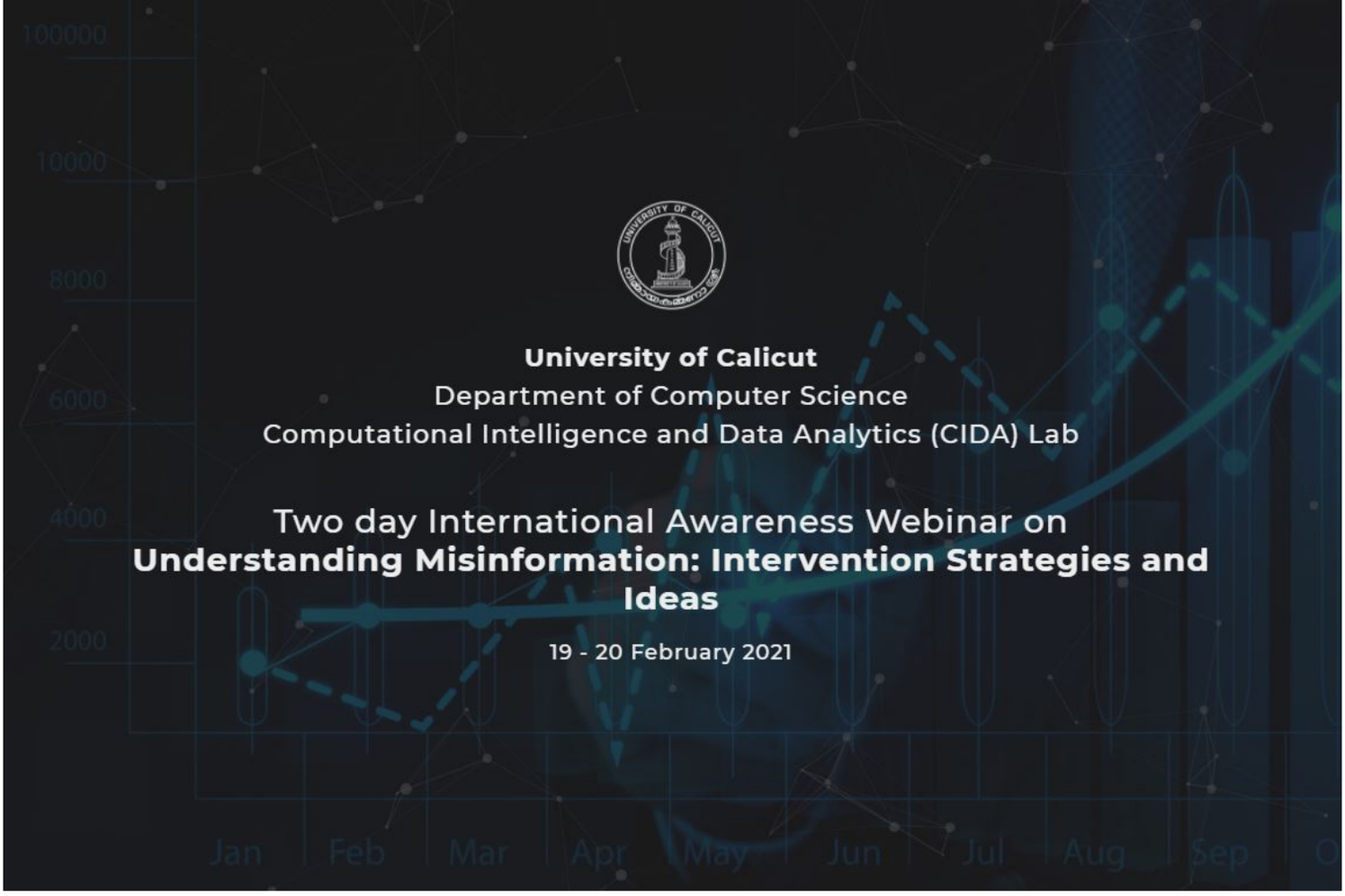
Upcoming Events

World Health Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR Europe

19 February 2021

WHO's Regional Office for Europe is hosting a webinar on Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, And COVID-19 Vaccines where cognitive scientist Stephan Lewandowsky will discuss evidence, key concepts and tools for addressing conspiracy theories and other misinformation, especially related to COVID-19 vaccines. Evidence shows that some people fall prey to conspiracy theories when they suffer a loss of control, and that pandemics have fostered conspiracy theories for centuries. Greater endorsement of COVID-19 conspiracies is linked to less adherence to government guidelines and less willingness to take tests or be vaccinated. Register to attend.



19-20 February 2021

WHO will be participating in a two-day webinar hosted by the University of Calicut. The webinar will cover strategies and interventions to understand and address misinformation, and at the end of the programme, participants will be able to understand more about infodemic management for better health. Register to attend.

Ordine Nazionale Biologi

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI ROMA

I BIOLOGI E LA REALTÀ CBRNe*

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WEBINAR

Saluti
Sen. Dott. Vincenzo D'Anna
Presidente dell'Ordine Nazionale dei Biologi

- Emergenze CBRNe
- Ricerca, didattica e Training per la mitigazione del rischio emergenziale: presentazione del progetto CBRNe presso l'Università di Roma Tor Vergata

Prof. Andrea Malizia e Dott.ssa Colomba Russo
- Master Internazionali in Protezione da Eventi CBRNe
- Dipartimento di Biomedicina e Prevenzione e Dipartimento di Ingegneria Industriale, Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata

- Il ruolo del Biologo in caso di pandemia COVID19 e non solo
- La comunicazione in emergenza

Dott. Nicola Simone
Biologo, Master Internazionale in Protezione da Eventi CBRNe - CREA-IT Pescara

- Biologia, tecnologia e medicina per contrastare le emergenze – Ricerca interdisciplinare
- Rischio biologico e sbocchi lavorativi

Dott. Gian Marco Ludovici
Biologo molecolare, Master Internazionali in Protezione da Eventi CBRNe

- Infodemia e ruolo del infodemic manager secondo l'Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità
- Contrasto fake news durante periodo Covid

Ing. Antonio Parrilla
Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

Moderatrice
Dott.ssa Daniela Arduini
Delegata nazionale alle Biotecnologie per l'Ordine Nazionale dei Biologi

22 febbraio 2021
Ore 15:30-18:00
www.onb.it

*Rischio Chimico-Biologico-Radiologico-Nucleare-esplosivi

22 February 2021

The Biologi e la realtà CBRNe is an Italian-based webinar where WHO

infodemic manager training alumnus, Antonio Parrilla, will present. Register to attend.

8-9 April 2021

The Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM) invites proposals for a virtual symposium: Responding to the COVID-19 Infodemic.

Proposals are due by 11:59PM, February 26, 2021. Submit here.

Proposals for presentations and panel discussions related to COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation should include but are not limited to:

- Health equity across a variety of demographic factors (race, gender, geography, socioeconomic status, etc.)
- Vaccination
- Emergency preparedness and response
- Public health
- Communication
- Community outreach and programming
- Education

7-10 June 2021

The International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM) is a forum for researchers from multiple disciplines to come together to share knowledge, discuss ideas, exchange information, and learn about cutting-edge research in diverse fields with the common theme of online social media. This overall theme includes research in new perspectives in social theories, as well as computational algorithms for analyzing social media. ICWSM is a fitting venue for research that blends social science and computational approaches to answer important and challenging questions about human social behavior through social media while advancing computational tools for vast and unstructured data.

Recent Events

3 February 2021

The Atlantic Council's GeoTech Center and Digital Forensic Research Lab hosted a special "GeoTech Hour" on the role that social media platforms play in enabling modern mis- and disinformation. Watch the recording.

Noteworthy Multimedia

Subscribe and listen.

Coronacast is a podcast that answers your questions about coronavirus. The hosts break down the latest news and research to help you understand how the world is living through a pandemic.

Listen for free on ABC listen app, Apple Podcasts or Google Podcasts.

What We're Reading

OXFORD ACADEMIC

Linking health information seeking to patient-centered communication and healthy lifestyles: an exploratory study in China

5 February 2021

World Health Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE Eastern Mediterranean

Transition from pandemic to infodemic: an analysis of Turkish-language COVID-19 YouTube videos

2 February 2021

healthcare

Web Search Engine Misinformation Notifier Extension (SEMiNExt): A Machine Learning Based Approach during COVID-19 Pandemic

3 February 2021

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health

Determinants of the Perceived Credibility of Rebuttals Concerning Health Misinformation

2 February 2021

Fun With Numbers

60, 42, 32

WHO recently launched a new tool called SCORE (Survey, Count, Optimize, Review and Enable). This tool helps identify gaps and provide guidance to governments about where to invest to have the greatest impact on the quality, availability, analysis, accessibility and use of health data.

SCORE collected data from 133 countries and found that almost 60% of countries have good capacity for using data and evidence to drive policy and planning, only 42% of countries have good capacity for data access and sharing. And 32% of countries have good capacity for a national digital health strategy based on recommended standards.

So what's the takeaway? Countries need to ensure effective use of health data to inform action on national and subnational priorities. This report comes at a particularly important time as COVID-19 has created demand for high-quality data, data sharing, and highlighted the need to address long-standing data gaps.

When countries can optimize health service data it can help ensure equitable, quality services for all.

Explore the interactive SCORE dashboard here, and download the 2020 SCORE report here.

About the News Flash

An infodemic is an overabundance of information—some accurate, some not—that spreads alongside a disease outbreak. Infodemics are nothing new, but in the digital age, they spread in real time and create a breeding ground for uncertainty. Uncertainty fuels skepticism and distrust, which is perfect environment for fear, anxiety, finger-pointing, stigma, violent aggression and dismissal of proven public health measures. To manage an infodemic, we need to understand what contributes to it. So that's why we're sending you these updates. In each issue of the WHO's Infodemic Management News Flash we'll share the latest work happening at the global level, as well as highlight some of the challenges and solutions with infodemics in local contexts. We'll also provide you with a few takeaways to help you be an effective infodemic manager in your daily life.

If you have a tip on infodemic management or an idea for a future News Flash, email us at **infodemicmanagement@who.int.** Thanks for joining us on this journey.

Our mailing address is: infodemicmanagement@who.int

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