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UCT celebrates 20 years of building vaccinology capacity across Africa

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) Vaccines for Africa Initiative (VACFA) marked a major milestone on Sunday, 2 November 2025, by hosting the 20th Annual African Vaccinology Course (AAVC) and celebrating two decades of advancing vaccinology training and collaboration across the continent.

Since its launch in 2005, the AAVC has trained 1 223 participants from 49 African countries, equipping professionals from government, academia, the private and public health sectors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society with the expertise needed to strengthen immunisation systems and protect communities.

The AAVC was established in response to a need for increased African capacity in both the design and implementation of home-grown solutions to the immunisation challenges faced across the continent. Course content is continually adapted to reflect evolving realities in African vaccinology, covering topics from vaccine development and regulatory science to health system strengthening, programme delivery and addressing misinformation and vaccine hesitancy.

At the heart of VACFA's mission is equitable access to training. To remove barriers related to cost or travel, VACFA secures funding from a wide network of partners, including philanthropic organisations and pharmaceutical companies, ensuring participation from professionals working in resource-limited settings.

"Through these annual courses we have empowered a generation of African vaccinologists, healthcare workers and policymakers to make a meaningful impact in their own countries and regions," said VACFA founder and AAVC co-convenor, Professor Gregory Hussey, at the gala dinner celebrating the programme's 20th anniversary.

Beyond the classroom, the AAVC builds a connected community of practice that extends far beyond the annual course, according to Dr Edina Amponsah-Dacosta, co-convenor of the course and evidence-informed decision-making specialist at VACFA.

"We are working towards building a strong, connected regional community of practice, a network of AAVC alumni, faculty, mentors and partners who collaborate across borders, share solutions and respond to shared challenges," said Dr Amponsah-Dacosta.

"The AAVC is not simply a course, it is a community and a movement to amplify African voices in public health, protect the progress we have made so far, and support those most vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases."

Vaccines in Africa: progress and challenges

Vaccines remain one of the most effective public health tools, preventing an estimated three to five million deaths globally each year from diseases such as diphtheria, measles and tetanus. Yet Africa continues to face high rates of vaccine-preventable diseases due to persistent inequities in access, limited health-system capacity and the effects of conflict, humanitarian crises and climate-related disruptions.

According to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), more than 500 000 African children under the age of five die every year from vaccine-preventable diseases, and over 30 million fall ill. Even in urban centres like Cape Town and Johannesburg, gaps in coverage persist, leaving some communities at risk of preventable outbreaks.

The COVID-19 pandemic catalysed major investment in African vaccine manufacturing and regulatory capacity. However, it also highlighted a key lesson: lasting vaccine security depends not only on supply and technology, but on people. Africa needs a skilled and trusted community of scientists, policymakers, programme managers, communicators and health workers who can design, implement and champion sustainable immunisation programmes rooted in local needs and realities. This is what VACFA, through its AAVC, is working to build.

UCT, through VACFA and the AAVC, continues to lead efforts to build this skilled, connected and trusted community. This work advances the university's [Vision 2030](#) and [Strategy 2030](#) goals of transforming society through research, innovation and capacity development that serve the continent.

- [Listen to Professor Gregory Hussey's audio.](#)
- [Listen to Dr Edina Amponsah-Dacosta's audio.](#)

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