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ACCJ calls on Japan to recognize North America's SMART Health Card (SHC) digital vaccination certificates

The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) commends the Government of Japan's efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 and accelerate vaccination of the population, including foreign residents, in response to the recent emergence of the more contagious variants. Similarly, we fully support the Government of Japan's efforts to issue vaccination certificates, which are also known as vaccine passports.

In many countries, the need for digitally-verifiable (e.g., QR codes) vaccination certificates has increased for both international travel and domestic use. In July 2021, Japan began issuing paper vaccination certificates to those who received the full course of recognized Covid-19 vaccinations in Japan. We understand that the Government of Japan now intends to issue digital versions of these certificates by the end of 2021. Regardless of the specific format and system for digital certifications ultimately adopted, we urge the Government of Japan to ensure its format is aligned and broadly interoperable with those digital certificates that are already widely accepted, can flexibly and smoothly interact with other credible existing and emerging formats and standards, and will be reciprocal so as to not exclude those who already hold digital certificates issued in the United States of America and Canada, for example, or those residents of Japan who received vaccinations overseas and have official paper vaccination records but do not have digital certificates.

For example, the SMART Health Card (SHC) is one widely-used verifiable credential standard for digital certificates in the United States and Canada, and the SHC has achieved international acceptance and has a high degree of built-in versatility and interoperability with other systems. We request the Government of Japan to recognize multiple international formats for digital certificates, including SHC. We believe SHC should be among the accepted formats for the following reasons:

- SHC is a widely accepted international standard in North America (the United States of America and Canada), which is one of the most important markets for Japan economically and in terms of international exchange. As of August 30, 2021, over 150 million Americans are enabled to issue their SHC certificates and over 600 medical facilities, as well as major American pharmacy chains which have collectively provided millions of vaccinations, have adopted SHC. Additionally, several states, including New York and California, have already adopted SHC standards for their vaccination databases.
- SHC supports both the English and Japanese languages. Furthermore, the SHC system does not require a passport number although the data point is optional, in contrast to some other digital vaccine certificate systems that are linked to the holder's passport number and thus can only be issued to people who have passports.
- Consistent with the need for broad interoperability, the SHC allows linkage with CommonPass, one of the international standards of vaccination passports implemented in Hawaii, for which trial operations have been conducted by Japanese airlines.

The rapid increase in COVID-19 infections due to variants has raised concerns over the delayed recovery of social and economic activities. For a speedy and safe restart of activities, it is imperative to prioritize vaccination and the digitization of certificates of vaccination and PCR test results. In this context, we urge Japan to adopt SHC as one among multiple standards for digital vaccine certificates to facilitate the safe resumption of international travel that is vital to Japan's economy, and to issue any authorizations required domestically by governments, institutions or businesses for the acceptance of digital vaccine certificates, while also continuing comprehensive measures to promote vaccine distribution and counter the COVID-19 pandemic.