One of the principal aims of the OIE is to safeguard international trade through the development of health standards for animals and animal products.

The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code recommends the use of high quality vaccines and diagnostic tests to control diseases.

The standards and criteria to produce and control these vaccines and laboratory assays are clearly described in the OIE Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals.

Expert advice is requested and coordinated by the OIE for the registration of diagnostic kits and for the establishment of OIE vaccine banks. Experts from OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres can also receive a request for support to assess the quality of a vaccine, either directly from a Veterinary Service of an OIE Member Country or indirectly through a request asking the Director General of the OIE to propose an expert. The vaccine can then be assessed in vivo, in vitro or via evaluation of the dossier depending on the available means and budget. Although the expert is nominated as an OIE expert, this kind of quality assessment is made in the expert's personal capacity. This gives the expert a certain degree of 'freedom to operate'. The disadvantage of this approach is the lack of harmonisation and the uncertainty related to the final responsibility of the expert, including in cases where advice is not used in a correct way. The need for guidelines and forms to steer, harmonise and improve such kind of expert advice process should be discussed.