

MEPs Interest Group



Official launch 2019-2024 term

1

JOINED FOR VACCINATION

ADDRESSING VACCINE HESITANCY AND INCREASING UPTAKE IN EU A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

28th January 2020

European Parliament, ASP3H1 (Brussels)

16.00 -18.00

Hosted by MEP Brando Benifei, S&D Group

Welcome address

Mariano Votta, Director of Active Citizenship Network

Dear participants,

Good afternoon and welcome to the launch event of the second term of the “MEPs Interest group on patients’ right and cross-border healthcare”

For my organization, Cittadinanzattiva-Active Citizenship Network, this day is full of messages and meanings, so thank you for joining us today. We are proud to be the promoter of this political initiative, that realized more than 11 events last term, endorsed by almost 100 associations across Europe. This Interest Group renews its commitment to be an opportunity for the development of the policy making process on health at the EU level: considering the civic participation strategic source to improve and safeguard the public healthcare system.

In the past legislature, this Interest Group was chaired by two Presidents of the 8 Parliamentary Groups, and supported by others 24 MEPs.

At the beginning of this second term, there are already 12 MEPs that have decided to join the Interest Group: a special thank first of all to the MEP Brando Benifei not only for hosting the today event, but mainly for having accepted to be the Co-Chair, showing its commitment on the topic, together with his Croatian colleague Tomislav Sokol, here present, that I thank as well.

Together with them, I am glad to express my gratitude for **joining the Group** to the MEPs, ~~alphabetical order~~: Eleonora Evi, Aldo Patriciello, Piernicola Pedicini, Sabrina Pignedoli, Patrizia Toia (**from Italy**), and also to Sara Cerdas (from Portugal), Miriam Dalli (from Malta), Kateřina Konečná (Czech Republic), Sirpa Pietikäinen (Finland), Christel Schaldemose (Denmark).

In line with the commitments taken during the first mandate, the objective is to increase - in a multi stakeholder perspective – the cooperation among EU Institutions, citizens & patients organizations, experts and private entities. It will be focused on the one hand, on the patients' rights for the reduction of health inequalities, and on the other hand, on the priorities underlined by the new EU Health Commissioner.

To these two objectives we want to add a third one, strictly linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Such an initiative could pave the way for the reform of the European system together with the need to respond to citizens' demand to participate in change by laying the foundations for a renewed consensus on the European project. The Presidents of the European Parliament, the Commission and the European Council will meet in Paris on 30 January to define a common position on the European Conference.

“I want citizens to have their say at a Conference on the Future of Europe” said the Commission President and, recently, in its resolution on the Conference on the Future of Europe, the European Parliament proposed that several thematic Citizens' agoras reflecting the policy priorities should be held throughout the Conference process.

We'd like to consider this Interest Group as the agora focused on patients unmet needs, and the health priorities from a citizens perspectives. Before the EU elections, last 9th of April 2019, in occasion of the XIII European Patients' Rights Day, we have promoted a debate on citizens' expectations with a selection of MEP candidates and, then, published a Position paper on prevention, innovation and a new health governance for the new EU Institutions, drafted by ACN

with the endorsement of 18 associations. The first request sent to the new EU Institutions is linked with the need to increase resources for health prevention, in both directions: the key role of screening and the promotion of a life-course vaccination approach. The fact that the first initiative promoted in the framework of the Interest Group is linked to vaccination policies, is proof of the attention that It wants to guarantee to this topic and more generally to the topic of prevention.

We have started to work for this event in the autumn of 2019, when hundreds of thousands of Europeans visit their general practitioner to get “the flu shot” in order to protect themselves from one of the most common epidemics; influenza. It is no coincidence that during these months, when public awareness around vaccination is especially high, we were involved *in different events* around vaccination, such as the Global Summit on Vaccination held by WHO, the 2nd meeting of the Coalition for Vaccination, last but not least, the Annual Meeting of the European Joint Action on Vaccination. In all of these initiatives, ACN promoted a better citizen engagement in the context of life-course immunization approach. But how many of these initiatives have reached civil society and a more general audience? Have these events been successful in involving citizens organization in these efforts, and how well has the hard work and progress been communicated to them? Have stakeholders at all levels been engaged in these initiatives?

Being a civil society organization and having represented patients’ rights for 40 years, we are sure that initiatives which are led by civil society can have benefits in terms of not only reaching a more general audience, but also enhancing the synergies between patients and experts.

In particular, with the today initiative, we aim:

- to sensitize the new EU Institutions on the topic and to ensure that the newly elected Members of the European Parliament carry forward the commitment ~~on the topic~~ for this term: vaccination must be at the top of the EU Health agenda and priorities.
- To make sure that the initiatives promoted by EU Institutions as well the ones undertaken by the EU Joint Action on Vaccination are disseminated to a wider audience, including citizens and patients' organizations/advocacy groups.
- to contribute to share best practices among all stakeholders involved in the field of citizens engagement on vaccination.

I hope that these suggestions will be taken into consideration by the precious guests present today, experts who I thank in advance for accepting the invitation and for the contribution they will be able to give to the debate.

Well, my turn is over, I just want to thank again in advance all the panelists, and a special thanks to Patrick Mahy, who accepted the role of moderator today. With a long experience on basic research in immunology, Patrick is a Business Development Manager that since 2010 works for the Scientific Institute of Public Health (Sciensano), as the head of the expertise and customer relation unit. He was also involved with the IMI Advance project in which he invested and is now in charge of the follow-up program in VAC4EU as a founder and administrator. So he is the right expert to chair today's event.

Thanks again for the attention. I wish you a fruitful meeting.

Mariano Votta