



Introduction

Mariano Votta, Director, Active Citizenship Network (ACN)

Good morning, everyone.

As already anticipated by Daniela, today we will focus on Vaccine Preventable Respiratory Diseases (VPRS). Beyond COVID-19 (to which we have dedicated a specific in-depth day, yesterday), we have a trio of vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases (VPRDs). The flu season has already begun (at least in Italy)¹: it is imperative to ensure that influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are all in the radar of Patient Advocacy Groups (PAGs) active in vaccination promotion. In recent years, respiratory diseases have become one of the most significant health challenges of the modern world. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted this urgent health issue and called for long-term strategies to combat these diseases. Respiratory diseases are among the most common reasons for adult hospitalization, contributing to substantial direct treatment costs.

Experts and available scientific data² indicate that many respiratory diseases can be mitigated at a relatively low cost through preventive vaccinations, such as those against influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, and COVID-19. Vaccination remains the most effective form of protection and a

¹ <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2024/10/influenza-individuato-a-novara-il-primo-caso-italiano-della-stagione-un-adulto-in-buone-condizioni-6e0cb9c9-63eb-4db8-bb03-b585b05dd99a.html>

² <https://www.activecitizenship.net/multimedia/files/documents/2022-Vaccine-preventable-respiratory-diseases-challenges-and-recommendations-for-the-future-document.pdf>

cornerstone of modern public health. To maximize the resilience of our society and health system to future pandemics and the growing problem of respiratory diseases, it is essential to prioritize prevention and public education. Additionally, significantly expanding vaccination programs and developing and implementing a life-cycle vaccination strategy that includes adults, is crucial.

Towards the Europe's Beating VPRDs Plan

Drawing on the experience of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, we would go so far as to say that the new European Institutions should work towards an Europe's Beating VPRDs (vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases) Plan. We would be ready to make our contribution. It is no coincidence that the title of the today meeting - Vaccination Informal Platform (V.I.P.) for life-course immunization promotion – stems from the desire to strengthen the exchange of experiences and collaboration among the many expressions of active citizenship working to support public vaccination policies. The goal is to update a narrative that, when it comes to vaccination, almost never refers to the active role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Patient Advocacy Groups (PAGs), instead focusing mainly on hesitant or even hostile attitudes toward vaccines, which, though present, do not represent the whole picture. We know we can play a constructive role with institutional and non-institutional stakeholders, as well as act as a driving force for other organizations. This is why we will dedicate the second part of today to sharing good practices for promoting vaccination against vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases (VPRDs), familiarizing ourselves with the tools we've worked on over the past months to better use them in our own contexts, and learning more about EU Flu Day – celebrated tomorrow at the European Parliament – and why it would be worthwhile to promote it at a national level as well.

But first, as always, we will begin with the educational session, for which we have invited independent experts – whom I would like to thank in advance – to speak to us about the burden of vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases (VPRDs) on adults and at-risk populations.

The economic value of prevention

From my side, I just want to remember that the economic value of prevention has been well documented. Preventive care, including healthy lifestyle promotion, screening programs, health literacy programme and immunization, enables long-term benefits by reducing healthcare costs and increasing productivity, ultimately adding substantial value to economic and social systems while

supporting public fiscal sustainability³. For instance, studies suggest that every euro spent on preventive healthcare generates a 14-euro return, and adult immunisation can return up to 19 times the initial investment⁴.

Also for these reasons, spending on preventive healthcare can be considered an “investment,” as it entails potentially higher growth and reduces future expenditure. Unfortunately, from one hand, this concept is far from the agenda of the decision makers at the EU level. And from the another hand, today, only a small percentage of national healthcare budgets is spent on prevention, and even less on immunisation (0,5%)⁵.

Well, before to leave the floor, please let me remember – as already anticipated by Daniela – that today's initiative is part of the activities carried out in the framework of the European project “#VaccinAction 2024: Protecting the value of vaccination after the COVID-19 pandemic across Europe: impact, experiences and perspectives of citizen & patient advocacy groups” promoted by Cittadinanzattiva-Active Citizenship Network and supported for the fourth year in a row by the companies GSK, MSD, Pfizer, Sanofi, whom I thank for their continued trust.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank today's two media partners, VaccinesToday and TrendSanità-Policy and Procurement in HealthCare.

As always, we ask you to make the most of this opportunity by interacting and not hesitating to ask questions. Thank you again for your participation.

I wish you a fruitful event.

³ https://www.ambrosetti.eu/site/get-media/?type=doc&id=21451&doc_player=1

⁴ <https://www.vaccineseurope.eu/media-hub/publications/the-value-of-prevention-for-economic-growth-and-the-sustainability-of-healthcare-social-care-and-welfare-systems/>

⁵ <https://www.ambrosetti.eu/en/news/the-value-of-prevention-for-economic-growth-and-the-sustainability-of-healthcare-social-and-welfare-systems/>