

OPENING REMARKS

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Good morning and a very warm welcome to everyone present in the room and to all those connected remotely.

First of all, allow me to express our deepest gratitude to Cypriot MEP Michalis Hadjipantela[1] (EPP Group) — member of the Committee on Public Health (SANT)[2] and supporter of the MEPs' Interest Group on "European Patients' Rights & Cross-border Healthcare"[3] — for the continuous commitment he shows towards the organization I represent, Cittadinanzattiva-Active Citizenship Network, and more broadly towards civil society. My warmest greetings and sincere thanks also go to MEP Tomislav Sokol[4] (EPP Group, Croatia), co-chair of the Interest Group, who is present here today.

I would also like to take this opportunity to warmly thank all the speakers of today's roundtable for accepting our invitation, starting with the representative of the European Commission who is joining us today remotely from her office in

[1] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/it/256985/MICHALIS_HADJIPANTELA/home
[2] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/sant/home/highlights
[3] https://www.interestgroup.activecitizenship.net/
[4] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/197417/TOMISLAV_SOKOL/home

Luxembourg, and who directly oversees the dossier on the *"Council Recommendations on vaccination as a preventive measure for cardiovascular diseases."*

From the public consultation in August–September 2025[5,6] to this day, we have dedicated substantial time and made every effort, within our capabilities as a civic organization, to contribute to the work on the EU Safe Hearts Plan[7], ensuring it gives proper attention to the importance of immunisation against respiratory infections in preventing cardiovascular diseases.

We see this as an extraordinary public health opportunity. That is why, since mid-January of this year, we have also been working collectively through the Steering Group on Prevention of Respiratory Infections[8], of which we are members and whose Co-chair Prof. Russell, is here with us today. Through this collective effort, we have helped shape and put forward amendments to the report of the European Parliament's Public Health Committee on "An EU cardiovascular diseases strategy"[9]. We then directly promoted — or co-promoted through our partner associations — continuous policy dialogue initiatives with the European institutions right here at the European Parliament, both in March[10] (hosted by MEP Hadjipantela) and in May[11].

Recently, on 28 September, we warmly welcomed the Commission's Proposal for a *"Council Recommendation on cardiovascular health checks: an EU approach to early*

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14755-EU-cardiovascular-health-plan_en

[6] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14755-EU-cardiovascular-health-plan/F32844720_en

[7] https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/cardiovascular-health_en

[8] https://www.vaccineseurope.eu/collaborations/coalitions-and-ppps/steering-group-on-prevention-of-respiratory-infections/

[9] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/SANT-PR-782349_EN.pdf

[10] https://www.activecitizenship.net/events/1360-18-march-2026-european-parliament-brussels-belgium-council-recommendation-on-the-value-of-immunisation-against-respiratory-infections-a-step-towards-an-eu-respiratory-health-plan.html

[11] https://www.activecitizenship.net/events/1386-5-may-2026-european-parliament-brussels-belgium-positioning-respiratory-health-as-a-strategic-priority-in-eu-policy.html

detection and screening"[12] — which explicitly recognises the role of vaccination in cardiovascular disease prevention and includes it as part of a personalised prevention approach. In anticipation of its formal approval scheduled for Tuesday, 8 December 2026[13], we reaffirm here and now our full willingness to collaborate: with institutions, with healthcare professionals, and with all key public and private stakeholders. Our common goal is to help bring these recommendations down to the ground as swiftly as possible, right into that specific doctor's office each and every one of us attends.
And this is our first core message today (moving from European legislative adoption to everyday clinical reality), giving meaning and substance to the *"towards and beyond"* in the title of our event.

In the meantime, we keep our attention firmly focused on the Commission's stated intentions to propose next year a specific Council Recommendation to promote immunisation as a measure to prevent cardiovascular diseases. We are deeply convinced that immunisation strategies are "among the best investments a country can make to save lives, protect communities, and boost its economy," to borrow the words recently spoken by Bill Gates[14]. In this regard, just a few days ago, new data from Gavi, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, showed that vaccination programmes supported by the Alliance generated over 30 billion US dollars in economic benefits in 2025 alone across lower-income countries[15,16].

[12] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2026:481:FIN
[13] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10983-2026-INIT/en/pdf
[14] https://www.linkedin.com/posts/williamhgates_vaccines-are-among-the-best-investments-a-share-7518737091481231361-v74-/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_android&rcm=ACoAAAYfvVUBeEnkl4mrDww5At9cFeUP0wiJmFQ
[15] https://www.gavi.org/news/media-room/vaccines-deliver-over-us-30-billion-economic-benefits-lower-income-countries-2025
[16] https://www.gavi.org/sites/default/files/2026-10/Gavi-2025-Annual-Progress-Report.pdf

This is a powerful reminder that investing in prevention is not simply a cost for health systems: it is an investment in healthier populations, more resilient economies and long-term prosperity for our societies.

What does it mean for Europe? What is the return on our investment in immunisation? To bring clarity to this question, we have invited an esteemed health economics researcher today, to help us understand exactly what return every single euro invested in immunisation generates in our countries.

An economic approach is often decisive in conveying certain messages in a political setting, and today we are in a political venue. It is a message that intermediary bodies of society — civil society organizations and patient advocacy groups, when properly engaged and trained — increasingly wish to help translate into something as tangible as possible, so that it can be effectively communicated to citizens and patients. Always remembering their threefold value: vaccines provide value **to individuals**, by saving lives and preventing severe disease; **to the healthcare system**, by reducing outpatient visits and hospitalisations, preventing systems from becoming overwhelmed and freeing up vital resources for other patients; and thirdly, **to society as a whole**, by enabling an active and healthy workforce throughout the entire life course[17]. And this is our second message.

Our third message is that immunisation is not solely about avoiding infection: we must vigorously emphasize the secondary benefits of vaccination, which extend well beyond the prevention of respiratory diseases alone. The role of immunisation in cardiovascular disease prevention has been explicitly recognized by the European Commission in the Safe Hearts Plan, and it is backed by an increasingly robust body of

[17] https://www.vaccinestoday.eu/stories/adult-vaccination-gives-19x-return-on-investment/

scientific evidence — including the landmark statement by the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), tellingly titled "Vaccination as a new form of cardiovascular prevention"[18]. Immunisation must be at the very heart of cardiovascular disease prevention and, more broadly, systematically integrated into care pathways for chronic diseases.

Today we have the privilege of having with us healthcare professionals and experts from diverse disciplines, all agreeing — especially in today's context of scarce and strained resources — on the strategic value of prevention across the entire life course. In this context, we sincerely hope that the newly announced "Joint Action LifeLong Prevention"[19] (expected to launch by the end of 2026 to support Member States in preparing and progressively operationalizing/implementing the Safe Hearts Plan) will take into full account the message and measures emerging from the forthcoming Council Recommendations on vaccination as a preventive measure for cardiovascular diseases. It is essential that the Joint Action gives due recognition to the value of immunisation and to the contribution of those working to advance it.

Among the planned activities, we know there will be targeted actions on "health literacy for vulnerable groups"; and that is also why we have invited an esteemed expert on this topic today, with whom we have collaborated for years, connected with us remotely from Portugal.

[18] https://academic.oup.com/eurheartj/article/46/36/3518/8177060
[19] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/projects-details-tr/43332642/101325189/EU4H?order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=10&sortBy=es_SortDate&topicAbbreviation=EU4H-2026-JA-SANTE-IBA-02

More broadly, from our civic perspective, we believe it is essential — as has successfully occurred in past Joint Actions, starting with the EU Joint Action on Vaccination [20] — to find effective ways to involve civil society and patient organizations in a structured manner, in full consistency with the European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2026 on an EU cardiovascular diseases strategy[21]. And this is a further key message.

Knowing how dramatically low the share of resources each country allocates to prevention remains — historically dubbed "the Cinderella" of healthcare spending — the Joint Action will face the arduous but noble task of transforming Cinderella into a Princess. Metaphors aside: doubling the resources dedicated to prevention.

Rather than in fairy tales, we continue to believe in the high value of politics in making sound, courageous, and far-sighted decisions for the population: such as those supporting adult vaccination policies, which can return up to 19 times their initial investment to society. This is no fairy tale, as we will hear in detail in just a few moments.

Thank you all for your attention, and I wish you a very productive meeting.

[20] https://eu-jav.com/

[21] "Calls for the Commission and Member States to recognise the essential role of health civil society organisations and patient organisations in cardiovascular disease prevention, awareness-raising, peer support, patient empowerment and policy development; stresses that the continuity, independence and effectiveness of their work rely on adequate, sustainable and transparent public funding". "Calls for the Commission to establish an EU mission on CVD prevention and inequalities, which should bring together a dedicated EU-level task force of public authorities, scientific experts, civil society and relevant industry actors, coordinated with relevant EU bodies, in order to support Member States". Cfr.: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2026-0304_EN.pdf; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2024_2029/plmrep/COMMITTEES/SANT/DV/2026/06-24/FinalCompromiseAmendmentsCVD_EN.pdf;