



Adult Vaccination: build the capacity and capabilities of civil society

EU TRAINING SEMINAR

29th April 2022

14:30 – 16:30 CEST

WELCOME

Mariano Votta

Director Active Citizenship Network/Cittadinanzattiva

Good afternoon and welcome to everyone. I am extremely proud about this initiative realized within the „European Immunization week”, an appropriate moment – as remembered by WHO - to celebrate the historic achievements in protecting lives and livelihoods made possible by vaccines, and to acknowledge their further potential to protect public health.

Recently we have felt the need to combine a public activity, in which we take into consideration the perspective of citizens in the process of policy making at the EU level, with a more reserved but necessary meeting to explore issues that are particularly significant to us, such as vaccines.

Actually, the request of this kind of meeting came directly from our constituency, which requested us to satisfy the need to be more up-to-date and prepared on the topic of vaccination, that – without any doubt – characterized at least our last 2 years. With much effort, we are all together slowly overcoming **the difficult situation lived during the first wave of the pandemic**, when oncological & chronic patients were left almost alone, with the risk to jeopardize 20 years of improvement in prevention & care. Indirectly, with many vaccination centres closed and the routine vaccination plans suspended, it was sent the message that the routine vaccination was not necessary, while it is correct the contrary, as you know better than me. It is a key vaccination especially for vulnerable target groups, starting from chronic patients that, according to our recent survey carried across Europe with the involvement of 38 PAGs, in 60% have denounced the lack of therapeutic adherence during the pandemic.

As my colleague Maddalena has already mentioned, **we feel the need to maintain a high level of attention on the so-called routine vaccinations, with particular attention to adult vaccinations**. This distinctive feature of our commitment at the European level is reinforced by the awareness that the protection of citizens' rights, not only patients, cannot be guaranteed without proper information, especially on the subject of vaccines, where it is essential to distinguish between reliable sources of information and fake news. We believe that **a well-informed citizen who is aware of his rights is a resource for the society**. For this reason, we are happy to invest in the empowerment of citizens. And this is a second trait which characterizes us.

The third is the need to help defeat misinformation by promoting collaborations between those who know and those who are in contact with citizens. In this, let me thank in advance our very appreciated guest Stefania Maggi who accepted our invitation to share her knowledge.

As you know, in addition to the virus there is the need to fight and defeat “anti-science”, and in this **the alliance among research, information and intermediate bodies is essential**: "to disseminate knowledge is key to solicit participation", as underlined by the President of the Italian Republic some time ago. In my country a well-known and widely used popular saying states "**we are all adults and vaccinated**", meaning that we are all able to speak openly about "taboo" subjects, but also that we do not get easily deceived into believing what's not true. Being adults and being vaccinated, according to this old popular way of saying, were synonymous of being safe and protected. Instead, people currently run the risk of being misled by the running fake news on vaccination, and this is a paradox no longer acceptable.

A last reason why we are happy to have organized today's event is the need to **broaden the consistency of the associations** committed to the subject. There is a need to reflect on the role of advocacy activities on vaccination led by PAGs, that, to be honest, is in large part not still enough, as well as it remains NOT so common the collaboration between key stakeholders & civil society groups. The culture of the life-course immunization approach is still lacking among the adult population in general, and also among chronic patients associations. Probably also because we need to avoid any silos approach and need to be more engaged **in the debate on vaccination, where unfortunately I do not find a large involvement of PAGs**, so I encourage their leaders to take a greater part in the national vaccination plans and to support communication campaigns that need to be incentivized. And with this occasion, please let me congratulate with the International Federation on Ageing, today represented by the Secretary General Jane Barratt, for their commitment since several years to advocating for vaccination policies. Yesterday I was invited in occasion of their launch of an Adult Vaccination Advocacy Toolkit to empower civil society to address policies that constitute barriers for improving adult vaccination rates. And today she has accepted to share their experiences with us.

Last but not least please let me remember that this initiative is realized with the unconditional support of GSK, MSD, Pfizer, Sanofi that I want to thank.

As declared by WHO some days ago, the progress we have made as a Region in protecting children and adults from life-threatening diseases deserves celebration, but we must not take this for granted. Maintaining this progress is the responsibility of all, and it will require collective effort during this decade. We are ready to play an active role.

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