

Time to unlock the full value of vaccines

Vaccines Europe's Position Paper March 2020

Executive Summary

Prevention of diseases through vaccines and vaccination programmes saves millions of lives globally and generates broad public health value, not only by delivering significant health benefits, at the individual and population level, but also by creating savings for the public health systems of EU Member States. Increased investment in public vaccination programmes, recognition of the broader (i.e. direct & indirect) value of vaccines and improved program implementation (e.g. coverage) will save more lives and protect more people throughout all stages of life; it will also extend access to currently available and future vaccines, create cost savings by preventing disease and provide additional economic value for society, due to improved individual and population health, and help to address antimicrobial resistance.

The challenge is to realise the many potential benefits that are now open to us, as vaccination can underpin and strengthen primary healthcare through the whole life course and play a key role in delivery of Universal Healthcare to the benefit of nations, communities and individuals.

Vaccination – a great success story

Vaccination is considered one of the greatest healthcare interventions of our time, having saved millions of lives^{1,2,3} and greatly reduced disease, disability and inequity worldwide^{4,5}. Only clean water, which is also considered to be a basic human right, has performed better⁶. Vaccination is also an essential tool for the fight against major global health threats such as cancer (Papillomavirus and Hepatitis B), chronic diseases^{1,3,7} protecting the vulnerable and those not able to be vaccinated (community immunity¹) and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)^{8,9} by reducing the use of antibiotics, arguably as a first line defence.

Over the last century, vaccination has supported the development and maintenance of healthy and productive societies⁵ and continues to do so¹. As one of the leading cost-effective interventions, vaccination provides a significant return on investment¹⁰ and continues to contribute to substantial economic growth¹¹.

Sustainable funding for prevention and vaccination needed

Vaccination is an important component of healthcare provision and is the foremost preventive measure to protect populations against the consequences of the spread of infectious diseases; yet, only a small percentage of national healthcare budgets are allocated to prevention (which also has an expanding agenda e.g. healthy aging, obesity etc), with an even smaller proportion devoted to vaccination. In a study covering seven Western European Countries, prevention accounted for 0.90% to 4.66% of healthcare spending over the 2005–2016 period, whereas, vaccines accounted for less than 0.5% (range 0.15%–0.50% in all countries except Germany, allocating 0.62% in 2016). Moreover, spending on health prevention per capita has decreased in most countries and for vaccines, the decline has been even more dramatic at up to a 10% p.a.¹².

Although, there is some recognition of the direct and indirect benefits of vaccination, funding of National Immunization Programs (NIPs) in several European countries remains insufficient, which has hindered the introduction of new innovative vaccines and has jeopardized access to existing vaccines. The public foregoes access to innovative vaccines for a median of approximately 6 years compared with a range of 2 to 3 years for drugs/treatments^{13&14}. This delay in vaccine adoption may have a significant impact, not only on the perception of the need and value of the vaccine but also in people's lives, public health, economic growth, prosperity and sustainability of health care systems. In the recently adopted Council Recommendation on strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs), EU member states are encouraged to develop and implement plans aimed at increasing vaccination coverage,

which should include provisions for sustainable funding and vaccine supply, a life-course approach to vaccination, a capacity to respond to emergency situations, communication and advocacy activities¹⁵.

The continuation of limited or even decreasing budgets for vaccination and a 'lowest price' commodity approach to procurement, rather than health value, bears significant risks:

- Inequity in access to vaccines across Europe.
- Healthcare system disruptions due to the resurgence of VPDs, the growing proportion of older adults and the increased burden of chronic illnesses.
- Discouragement of investment in development of new innovative vaccine technologies, production capabilities and capacity.
- Threatens long-term sustainability of vaccines manufacturing and supply in Europe, reducing our future ability to protect against significant infectious diseases.
- Limits capacity to react quickly to cross-border health threats.

We, the research-based vaccines industry in Europe are committed to:

- Invest in innovative vaccines for the future.
- Continue to produce vaccines that comply with high European quality standards.
- Invest in capacity, seek efficiencies and innovative solutions to further improve manufacturing and supply.
- Work with National and European authorities and stakeholders on the solutions proposed in the Council Recommendations and the Joint Action on Vaccination to accelerate access to vaccination and increase vaccination rates to protect people against VPDs.
- Engage in public-private partnerships with the global vaccine community, to make vaccines available throughout the world.
- Partner with Health Authorities to facilitate rapid responses to health emergencies.

Call to action

Country decisions on the use of vaccines should be evidence based (e.g. local epidemiology), led by the National Immunisation Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) and involve the application of vaccine specific methodological standards.

Vaccines Europe welcomes the European Council Recommendation on strengthened cooperation against VPDs, the EU Joint Action on Vaccination (JAV) and its provisions relating

to sustainable funding and vaccine supply. However, there are still public health requirements e.g. with respect to diseases covered and time to access vaccines.

Timing and resourcing of National Immunisation Programs (NIPs) primarily needs to be reviewed at National and / or provincial level; processes should focus on optimising vaccination coverage, with a view to reaching the goals and targets of the WHO's European Vaccine Action Plan 2015-2020.

Country plans should include provisions for consistent and sustainable processes for reimbursement and funding of vaccines to support adoption, timely and high-quality program implementation, in particular:

- Procurement practices that recognise and benefit from the value that innovative and new vaccines will bring to resolve existing and future unmet needs.
- Sufficient funds to accommodate improvements in vaccines calendars and address emerging demands, such as a life-course approach to vaccination and introduction of new vaccines.
- Pathways to address emergency situations (e.g. measles outbreaks due to poor coverage).
- Engagement in government communication and advocacy activities to provide guidance and address issues, such as vaccination hesitancy.

In this way, we believe EU countries and their populations will benefit from the value of vaccines in terms of immediate and longer-term public health gains pertaining to economic growth and the collective productivity of sustainable and healthy populations at all life stages.

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