

Active Citizens in Europe advocate for vaccination

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Mariano Votta's Final Remarks

- There are a lot of challenges facing vaccination across Europe: vaccine hesitancy, rising antimicrobial resistance (AMR), shifting epidemiology caused by migration, and of course budget pressures on health care systems. Since we think about advancing policies on vaccination, we need to be mindful regarding how we can help address these challenges. Prevention only represents 3% of all health care investment and vaccination represents the 10% of this 3%. In addition, vaccination has been demonstrated to be one of the most cost-effective public health strategies. When talking about priorities on the political agenda, what weight do we want to give to prevention? The answer to this question will help us to understand how much importance will be given to vaccination plans.
- According to the "State of Vaccine Confidence in the EU 2018", "in a number of EU countries, anti-vaccine groups, aided by social and mainstream media, are gaining traction and have started influencing politics and political elections". The topic has recently entered in the pre-electoral debate in some states, with the risk of being exploited politically. It is good to be better informed also in view of the next elections of the European Parliament. We would like to avoid the issue of vaccines being exploited during the next European elections but instead, if necessary, to be addressed from a scientific rather than a political perspective. Since this is not likely to happen, it's better to prepare ourselves in time.
- Almost all of us, to come here, went to the airline's website, bought a ticket and in the following days received alerts about when to check-in, the day and time of departure, the terminal and other information. Can we ever imagine that a similar system can be used for vaccinations? In some cases, similar solutions have been implemented, but we are still far from the fact that this system is a reality for European citizens. Among other things, personal and personalized reminders would be more effective than mass campaigns, as we read in January about a study conducted in the USA.
- (It goes without saying that we would not want to hear some controversy like those occurred in Italy on the salary of doctors for each vaccine given: recently family doctors have complained about being paid for the pneumococcus just over 6 euros compared to 12 of pediatricians).

- In my country, a well-known and widely used popular saying says "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 misled into believing what's not true. And currently on the subject of vaccines there is the risk of being misled because of the running fake news.
- According to the [European Health Report 2018](#) realized by the World Health Organization (WHO), life expectancy has increased in Europe, but smoking, alcohol, overweight and poor vaccination coverage put our health at risk. Globally, according to the WHO vaccines will save 25 million more lives in the coming decades. Certainly, vaccines are a factor that will play an important role also in terms of the 2030 Agenda for the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). And this must suggest to approach the phenomenon in its global dimension and to promote ever wider alliances.
- (Recently a book entitled "[Who is afraid of vaccines?](#)" has been published in Italy to support vaccines. The book reconstructs the evolution of the increasing loss of confidence among citizens and the progressive questioning of the authoritativeness of those who own scientific knowledge and skills. It dedicates a chapter to "Active citizenship in the knowledge society", to further evidence how organized civil society has to be recognized as an important driver in the care of the common good, especially health, and in this specific case in favoring a correct use of vaccines).

Possible next steps

Active Citizenship Network will take care of:

a) making a formal request to the Institutions to enlarge the constituency of the civil society represented in the Joint Action for vaccination and, more in general, within European policies dealing with vaccines. To do so, we will draft a *manifesto* of positioning endorsed by those civic society's associations involved in the topic of vaccines. The aim of the manifesto will be to strengthen cooperation among all relevant actors and to require EU institutions to be committed to vaccination. It will be promoted among the candidates of the EU Parliament and the representatives of the new elected institutions once after the EP elections.

b) promoting at the same time some concrete actions. For example:

- We asked [European Commission-DG Santè](#) for the creation of a thematic Expert group on vaccines within the [EU Health Policy Platform](#), a collaborative initiative (led by European Commission-DG Santè) to increase communication between EU Commission services and healthcare stakeholders.
- Yesterday we have invited leaders of 20 associations - here present today - for a training seminar and to plan common initiative in the upcoming months and along 2019.

- a) Together, we will contribute to the promotion of the core message of the European Immunization Week (EIW) through a widespread social media communication awareness campaign.
 - b) Also together, we would like to realize a civic evaluation on national policies on vaccination from a citizens' perspective, aiming at underlying the strengths and weaknesses of such policies. And in order to collect information and case history directly from citizens, we could organize an open day. This work will be in line with the Commission commitment on drafting common guidelines on the harmonization of the delivering of vaccination (overcoming and explaining the differences in the number of mandatory vaccinations, the differences in the access and in the delivery places etc..)
- To carry out a civic survey focused on pharmacist-delivered vaccination in selected Countries, such as France, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Italy.
 - To strengthen a link with the new Advisory Forum of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

Mariano Votta

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