



Key Calls to Action from the GCOA Expert Working Session: Linking Adult Immunization and Chronic Disease Management in the EU

FEBRUARY 2026



Overview

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) remain the leading cause of global mortality, responsible for 74% of deaths annually and imposing immense financial and societal costs as populations continue to age.¹ A growing body of evidence highlights the impact of preventable respiratory diseases as a major, modifiable risk factor for both the onset and progression of NCDs, yet targeted interventions remain underutilized. Routine adult immunization—particularly for high-risk groups like older adults and those managing chronic conditions—offers a significant but overlooked opportunity to strengthen NCD prevention and management—a strategy supported by leading experts in aging, policy, immunization, and NCDs, at a GCOA-convened roundtable on the topic in December 2024.^{2,3}

Despite their intertwined public health goals, European strategies for vaccination and chronic disease management remain fragmented, with existing policy frameworks often lacking effective integration mechanisms.^{4,5} Recent data demonstrate notable gaps in vaccine uptake among adults living with chronic conditions and older populations, especially for influenza and COVID-19, signaling missed opportunities to mitigate disease and improve outcomes.^{6,7}

Responding to these challenges, GCOA convened a roundtable of experts, policymakers, clinicians, and advocates to identify practical, actionable recommendations that advance vaccination among people with NCDs in Europe on June 24th, 2025. This recommendations document outlines key proposals developed during the discussion, aiming to drive policy harmonization and integration at both national and EU levels and to empower champions who can advocate for progress in healthy aging, NCD management, and immunization uptake.

Participants

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Pablo Estrella Porter, M.D.

Chair, Junior Doctors Network, World Medical Association

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1.

Generate and Communicate Localized Data on Health and Economic Impacts

To convince policymakers and the public on the value of adult immunization, it is essential for health systems, researchers, and other stakeholders to develop robust, localized data that quantifies both health and economic impacts, especially as they affect chronic disease development and management.

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A growing body of evidence shows that these infections trigger or worsen chronic conditions, making NCDs even more difficult to manage.”

Dr. Michael Hodin

When listening to all the experts in the room here, I think it’s really important that we try to quantify not only in health terms, but also in economic terms, what the broader value of vaccination is for elderly patients, in terms of helping with reducing severity of NCD’s.”

Dr. Lotte Steuten

Localized evidence will allow advocates to make the case for vaccines in terms that resonate with decision-makers and community members alike.

2.

Reframe the Narrative for Long-term and Societal Benefits

Messaging strategies must shift toward communicating the long-term health, social, and productivity benefits of vaccinations, addressing both immediate and future gains.

This reframing should acknowledge the needs of policymakers and politicians, whose decisions often consider extended time horizons and cross-sector outcomes.

3.

Highlight Productivity Gains for Working-Age Populations and Beyond

Vaccination is not only about protecting older adults—it keeps the working-age population healthier and more productive, benefiting the entire economy.

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The healthcare cost effectiveness is highest in the elderly, but the societal cost effectiveness tends to be very high in working adults as well.”

Dr. Lotte Steuten

Emphasizing these broader gains can help reach audiences outside the traditional healthcare sector by incorporating economic data into a reframed narrative, driving greater policy support.

4.

Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration and Break Down Silos in Policy and Medicine

Collaboration must go beyond healthcare sectors, extending into policy-making and medical specializations. Siloed approaches—in which adult immunization remains separated from other disease priorities—limit the effectiveness of public health strategies.

KEY COLLABORATION LEVERS:

Actively include adult immunization in broad-based strategies and major health initiatives, such as integrating vaccination into the upcoming EU Cardiovascular Health Plan. By embedding vaccine priorities within cardiovascular, respiratory, and other chronic disease frameworks, stakeholders can ensure sustained attention and resource allocation that optimizes outcomes across disease areas.

Break down silos not only between communicable and noncommunicable disease programs, but also within policy structures—engaging policymakers from various health and non-health portfolios to create unified approaches to healthy aging.

Leverage the expertise and advocacy of scientific and professional societies to drive home the interconnected nature of disease prevention and chronic disease management.

Integrating vaccination priorities into major policy frameworks and clinical specialty guidelines will drive more comprehensive, coordinated action, closing the gap between policy intent and real-world health outcomes.

5.

Improve Access Through Policy and Innovative Solutions

Systematically building immunization into guidelines and care pathways can standardize practices, reduce uncertainty, and empower both providers and patients.

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Whenever there is a healthcare provider recommendation, the uptake in patients increases quite a lot.”

Dr. Pablo Estrella Porter

Automated solutions like opt-out systems, rather than opt-in, should also be explored to further streamline access and reduce care variation.

Policy efforts should enable pharmacy-based and other convenient vaccination settings, meeting people where they are and lowering barriers to uptake.

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I think technology has the ability to either confuse or cause greater administrative burden to healthcare providers, or if executed well, it has the possibility to make it easier and increasing our use of vaccinations to decrease overall health burdens.”

Dr. Mark Stampehl

Expanding the scope of vaccinators and reducing administrative burdens will bolster vaccine uptake across all age groups, leading to reduced incidence of and improved non-communicable disease management.

6.

Build Trust and Drive Awareness Through Effective Communication

Urgent action is needed to strengthen public confidence in vaccines and leverage trusted messengers like healthcare providers and scientific societies in community outreach efforts.

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One of the problems we have is the problem of language and communication. Medicine is broken into silos of ‘communicable’ and ‘noncommunicable’ diseases but [in reality] this distinction does not exist....Communicable and noncommunicable diseases are interconnected and should be addressed as such. This [previous] division of medicine in two sections is not as valid today.”

Dr. Julio Ramirez

Consistent, aligned messaging—especially when reinforced by professional societies—can help bridge the gap between knowledge and policy action.

7.

Adopt a Life Course and Cross-generational Approach

Adult immunization strategies must go beyond older adults, targeting all age groups and addressing care gaps during transitions (e.g., from pediatric to adult care).

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We have proof that some people start aging very early, and it's not a matter of intervening at 60, 70, or more, but we need to start from education and role models, so that society at large can embrace [this approach].”

Dr. Paolo Magni

This approach encourages early intervention, education, and family-based strategies to promote healthy aging for everyone.

By taking these steps, policymakers can drive real progress in linking immunization to chronic disease management, ultimately advancing healthy aging across societies.

Conclusion

Addressing the dual challenges of rising noncommunicable diseases and low vaccination uptake among at-risk populations requires coordinated, sustained action across policy, practice, and public awareness. The recommendations outlined in this document reflect a shared commitment from experts, policy-makers, healthcare professionals, and patient advocates to close the gap between evidence and implementation.

By integrating life-course immunization into NCD prevention and management strategies, Europe can reduce avoidable illness, protect vulnerable populations, and contain escalating healthcare and economic costs. Success will depend on alignment between EU and national policies, investment in accessible vaccination services, and empowering informed communities to act.

This Call to Action is both an invitation and a roadmap—urging all stakeholders to work together to embed vaccination as a core pillar of healthy aging and chronic disease management, and to ensure that no opportunity to prevent illness and enable healthy aging is lost.

Endnotes

1. NCD Alliance, Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) Overview, (n.d.), <https://ncdalliance.org/explore-ncds/ncds>
2. Global Coalition on Aging, Vaccine-Preventable Respiratory Disease, Life Course Immunization, And Chronic Disease Management: The Healthy Aging Difference (April, 2025), https://globalcoalitiononaging.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/GCOA_LCI_NCD_Report_FINAL.pdf
3. Global Coalition on Aging, Vaccine-Preventable Disease, Life Course Immunization, and Chronic Disease Management, (n.d.), Mario Barbagallo et. all, https://globalcoalitiononaging.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/GCOA-Consensus-Statement_VPRDs-and-NCDS_May-2025.pdf
4. The European Commission, Healthier together - EU non-communicable diseases initiative, (n.d.), https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/healthier-together-eu-non-communicable-diseases-initiative_en
5. Access to European Union Law, Council Recommendation with a View to Correcting the Significant Observed Deviation from the Adjustment Path Toward the Medium-Term Budgetary Objective in Romania, (December, 2018), Council of the European Union, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX-3A32018H1221%2801%29>
6. European Union Patient, Vaccination and Patients with Chronic Conditions Background Report, (2018), European Patients' Forum, <https://www.eu-patient.eu/globalassets/policy/vaccination/resources/background-report—vaccination-and-patients-with-chronic-conditions.pdf>
7. World Health Organization, Vaccines for the Vulnerable: New WHO/Europe Study Shows the Impact of COVID-19 Vaccines in Safeguarding Health and Saving Lives, (October, 2024), <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/23-10-2024-vaccines-for-the-vulnerable-new-who-europe-study-shows-the-impact-of-covid-19-vaccines-in-safeguarding-health-and-saving-lives>



GCOA represents a cross-section of global business including technology, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, home care, financial, transportation, and consumer sectors. We engage global institutions, policymakers, and the public to drive debate on, create, and promote innovative policies and actions to transform challenges associated with the aging of the global population into opportunities for social engagement, productivity and fiscal sustainability.

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