

Establishing a European Vaccination Coverage Target for Pneumococcal Disease in Adults

Europe's demographic landscape continues to undergo a seismic shift. More than one fifth of the EU population is aged 65 and over, and by 2050 this figure is projected to grow to nearly one third. This trend has prompted the European Union to prioritise healthy ageing in recognition of the fact that maintaining good health and functional ability for older adults is essential for societal well-being as well as fiscal and economic sustainability – as exemplified by the 2021 European Commission Green Paper on Ageing and the Council Conclusions on 'Unlocking the potential of Older People'.

To truly make good on our commitments towards healthy ageing for a sustainable and competitive Europe, we need to ensure that our programmes and policies to prevent infectious respiratory disease are up to the task and have a meaningful impact. This includes recognising vaccination as a key pillar of healthy ageing and recognising the need to improve vaccination coverage for pneumococcal disease. This also includes recognising the fact that adult vaccines can return up to 19 times their initial investment to society.

In 2009, Europe took a major positive step towards preventing infectious respiratory disease with the Council Recommendation on Seasonal Influenza Vaccination and the establishment of a clear target of achieving 75% vaccination coverage for older age groups and individuals with chronic conditions. Although many Member States face challenges in reaching this target, it provides a powerful aspirational goal that leads to consistent data reporting, guides resource allocation, and holds health systems accountable.

It is time to harness the power of vaccination coverage targets towards reducing the burden of pneumococcal disease, which compounds the significant pressure already placed on health systems by influenza, COVID-19 and RSV. Pneumococcal disease is a significant threat in Europe, with its most serious form, invasive pneumococcal disease, affecting approximately 12,000 older adults (65+) each year, with 75% ending up in the hospital and 12.7% dying within 30 days. Due to a substantial lack of surveillance, this figure also potentially excludes tens of thousands of unrecorded infections, hospitalisations, and deaths. Furthermore, pneumococcal disease creates additional complications for patients with cancer and cardiovascular disease and contributes to anti-microbial resistance, exacerbating its negative impacts.

Despite this substantial burden, vaccination is an effective way to protect people against the worst outcomes of pneumococcal disease, and we have observed the power of European vaccination targets to galvanise support for improved awareness of and access to vaccines across our health systems. If we are serious about supporting healthy ageing for European citizens, promoting lifelong community participation, and building an economically sustainable Europe, it is time to establish a concrete target for adult pneumococcal vaccination coverage.

We, therefore, call upon European policymakers, including the European Commission, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, to:

**Establish a European Vaccination Coverage Target of 75% for
Pneumococcal Disease for adults aged 65 and older.**

The prevention of pneumococcal disease deserves the same level of attention as that given to influenza, RSV and COVID-19. To effectively reduce the devastating impact of pneumococcal disease and save lives, it is essential to establish an official target that aligns with the WHO Immunization Agenda 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Such a target would drive coordinated efforts among Member States, ensuring that pneumococcal vaccination receives the focus it urgently requires.

This EHMA Call to Action is endorsed by:

