

NCDs and Immunisation – Advancing Coordinated Advocacy and Action

Consensus Statement

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Background

Respiratory infectious diseases remain an under-recognised contributor to the burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). ^(1,2) As populations age and the prevalence of chronic conditions increases, the interconnection between ageing, chronic disease, and respiratory infections has become an important public health challenge.

Growing evidence demonstrates that respiratory infections, including influenza and COVID-19, can trigger acute cardiovascular events, exacerbate chronic conditions, and contribute to avoidable hospitalisation, loss of independence, and mortality, particularly among older adults living with frailty, multimorbidity, or those with underlying conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, chronic liver disease, and other conditions associated with an increased risk of severe respiratory infection outcomes. ^(2,3)

While the relationship between respiratory infections and NCDs is increasingly supported by evidence - including recent data suggesting that tailored influenza vaccination strategies may further reduce influenza-related and cardiovascular hospitalisation among older populations - adult immunisation continues to be viewed primarily through the lens of infectious disease prevention rather than also as an important component of comprehensive NCD prevention, management, and care. ^(2,3) As a result, opportunities to reduce preventable complications, improve health outcomes, strengthen health system resilience, and support healthy ageing remain underutilized.

These intersecting challenges reinforce the importance of adopting integrated, life-course approaches to prevention. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines healthy ageing as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age. ⁽⁴⁾ Maintaining functional ability requires preventing avoidable declines in health, including acute events that can accelerate frailty, disability, and loss of independence. ^(4,5) This is particularly important for frail older people and those living with multiple long-term conditions, for whom respiratory infections are more likely to precipitate functional decline, hospitalisation, and the need for higher levels of care. ^(6,7)

In this context, the WHO Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) framework recognises vaccination as an important intervention to help preserve intrinsic capacity, maintain functional ability, and support healthy ageing. ⁽⁸⁾ This emphasis is reflected across broader global policy frameworks, including the WHO Immunization Agenda 2030, the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, and broader global commitments on NCDs, which collectively reinforce the importance of integrated, life-course approaches to prevention, healthy ageing, and resilient health systems. These priorities are also reflected in regional initiatives, such as the EU Safe Hearts Plan, which highlights the importance of integrated approaches to cardiovascular disease prevention. ^(2,9)

Integrating adult immunisation within chronic disease prevention and management therefore represents an important opportunity to reduce the burden of respiratory infections, improve NCD outcomes, support healthier ageing, and strengthen health system sustainability.

Convening

Recognizing these opportunities, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) convened the virtual roundtable, *NCDs and Immunisation – Advancing Coordinated Advocacy and Action*, bringing together stakeholders from across immunisation, cardiovascular, respiratory, NCD, and ageing constituencies with the objective to strengthen collaboration across sectors, align shared messaging, and identify practical actions to better integrate adult respiratory immunisation within NCD prevention, care, and management.

Discussions focused on four interconnected themes: embedding vaccination within NCD care and system planning, developing unified messaging and coordinated advocacy, increasing awareness of the broader benefits of adult immunisation, and strengthening the economic and policy case for prevention.

Throughout the discussion, participants identified a shared opportunity to strengthen collaboration across immunisation, cardiovascular, respiratory, NCD, and healthy ageing communities, recognising that these sectors serve many of the same populations and pursue common health outcomes, yet have often advanced their work independently.

Priority Action Areas

This convening formed part of a broader commitment to embedding adult respiratory immunisation within cardiovascular and NCD prevention agendas. While participants brought diverse disciplinary perspectives, discussions converged around four priority calls to action that strengthen collaboration, inform policy and practice, and position adult immunisation as a recognised component of comprehensive NCD prevention, care, and management.

1. Integrate adult immunisation into routine NCD prevention and management

Objective: To advocate for adult respiratory immunisation as a routine component of comprehensive NCD prevention and management, including cardiovascular and respiratory disease, while supporting healthy ageing across policy, frameworks, care pathways, and routine models of chronic disease care.

"Vaccination is preventive medicine and should be part of the routine care of non-communicable diseases."

Participants emphasized that vaccination should be recognised not only as an infectious disease intervention, but also as an important component of preventive medicine that can be incorporated into routine NCD care, including cardiology, hepatology, respiratory, primary care, and other chronic disease care pathways.

As an evidence-informed strategy, vaccination provides the opportunity to reduce respiratory infection-related complications and support better long-term health outcomes.

Discussions also acknowledged the realities of ageing populations and multimorbidity, emphasizing that prevention strategies should reflect the interconnected nature of chronic conditions and support more holistic, person-centred models of care.

Opportunities for action:

- Advocating for the integration of adult respiratory immunisation, including influenza and COVID-19 vaccination, into national cardiovascular health, healthy ageing, and broader NCD policies, frameworks, and care pathways.
- Supporting the integration of adult respiratory immunisation into clinical guidance, standards of care, routine chronic disease management, and coordinated models of care, including improved information sharing on immunisation across primary, specialist, community, and pharmacy care settings.
- Strengthening cross-sector collaboration between immunisation, cardiovascular, respiratory, NCD, and healthy ageing communities, alongside multidisciplinary collaboration across healthcare professional groups, to advance shared priorities.
- Advancing integrated, life-course approaches across policy, practice, and advocacy that position adult immunisation as a core component of comprehensive NCD prevention and management, with clear ownership, measurements, and targets.

2. Develop shared messaging and coordinated advocacy across sectors

Objective: To establish shared, evidence-informed messaging that strengthens collaboration across immunisation, cardiovascular, respiratory, and healthy ageing communities.

"There are very few interventions that we can say are easy to implement, cost-effective, and effective across several disease groups. As an investment case for policymakers, that's a very good message to get across."

Participants recognised that organisations working across immunisation, ageing, cardiovascular and respiratory health, NCDs, and related sectors frequently pursue shared goals but often advocate independently.

It was highlighted that adult immunisation represents one of the few preventive interventions with benefits across multiple disease groups, providing a compelling and accessible message for policymakers and strengthening the case for coordinated advocacy across sectors.

Developing aligned messaging was viewed as an opportunity to strengthen advocacy efforts, support policy engagement, and better communicate the value of adult immunisation within chronic disease prevention.

Opportunities for action:

- Developing and promoting shared, evidence-informed advocacy messages across sectors (e.g., NCDs, immunisation, ageing, healthcare professional organisations and other related sectors).
- Building coordinated advocacy initiatives that amplify a common policy voice.
- Aligning communications around prevention, healthy ageing, and adult immunisation.
- Collective and cross-disciplinary advocacy of adult respiratory immunisation within broader NCD and cardiovascular policy agendas.

3. Increase awareness of the broader benefits of adult immunisation for NCD prevention and healthy ageing

Objective: To improve awareness among policymakers, healthcare professionals, and the public regarding the relationship between respiratory infectious diseases, cardiovascular complications, broader chronic disease outcomes, and the role of adult immunisation in preventing respiratory infections and their wider health impacts, while supporting healthy ageing.

"People do not appreciate the extent to which that respiratory virus vaccination is a great way to protect your heart and your heart health."

Participants consistently noted that awareness of the relationship between respiratory infections and cardiovascular and broader NCD outcomes remains low. While the evidence linking respiratory infections with acute cardiovascular events was recognised as one of the strongest and most compelling examples, participants emphasized that respiratory infections can also exacerbate other chronic conditions, contribute to avoidable hospitalisation, and place additional strain on individuals and health systems, with vaccination uptake remaining suboptimal across many high-risk populations.

Strengthening communication and translating emerging evidence into clear, accessible messages were therefore identified as essential to improving understanding, addressing implementation gaps in high-risk groups, and supporting more integrated approaches to prevention and chronic disease management.

Opportunities for action:

- Raising awareness of the relationship between respiratory infections and cardiovascular and broader NCD outcomes.
- Supporting innovative outreach and communication approaches, including immersive and experiential formats, to improve awareness of the broader benefits of adult immunisation in preventing respiratory infections, reducing complications across chronic conditions, and supporting healthy ageing.
- Developing and promoting coordinated public and healthcare professional education initiatives.
- Generating and translating evidence on the impact of adult respiratory immunisation across chronic conditions, including multimorbidity, into clear, actionable messages for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and the public, respectively.

4. Strengthen the economic and policy case for prevention

Objective: To position adult immunisation as a cost-effective investment that reduces avoidable cardiovascular and respiratory events, supports healthy ageing, and strengthens health system resilience.

"If you have a simple strategy like immunisation... we're investing in prevention and allowing a buffer to the health system."

Participants highlighted the disproportionate strain that NCD-related hospitalisations, particularly cardiovascular complications, place on health systems with limited budgets, fragmented care pathways, and constrained human resources.

Respiratory immunisation was framed as a cost-effective preventive strategy that reduces demand on strained systems while advancing healthy ageing and NCD outcomes.

By reducing severe respiratory infections and their downstream cardiovascular and broader chronic disease consequences, adult respiratory immunisation can contribute to fewer hospitalisations, reduced pressure on healthcare systems, lower healthcare expenditures, and improved quality of life for older adults and people living with chronic conditions.

Opportunities for action:

- Generating, strengthening, and promoting the economic evidence and investment case for adult respiratory immunisation, including its potential to reduce preventable hospitalisation, chronic disease complications, disability, and support longer-term independence.
- Advocating for the integration of prevention into health system planning, sustainable financing, broader health and NCD policy, and accessible models of vaccine delivery.
- Communicating the value of adult respiratory immunisation as a cost-effective investment that helps reduce preventable hospitalisation, chronic disease complications, and associated health system burden through coordinated messaging across organisational networks and constituencies.
- Positioning adult immunisation as an investment in healthy ageing, workforce participation, health system resilience, sustainability, and longer-term functional independence.

Conclusion & Acknowledgement

The priority action areas outlined provide a shared foundation for continued dialogue, coordinated advocacy, and evidence-informed action to strengthen the integration of adult respiratory immunisation within cardiovascular and respiratory disease prevention and broader NCD policy and practice.

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- European Multiple Sclerosis Platform (EMSP)
- European Scientific working group on Influenzas and other respiratory Viruses (ESWI)
- Global Allergy & Airway Patient Platform (GAAPP)
- Health Policy Partnership
- Vaccines Europe
- Vaccines Today
- World Diabetes Foundation
- World Federation of Public Health Association (WFPHA)
- World Heart Federation



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International Federation on Ageing
1 Bridgepoint Drive, Suite G.238
Toronto, ON, M4M 2B5, Canada

www.vaccines4life.com

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