

UNITING PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPAIGNS TO IMPROVE INFLUENZA AWARENESS

CONSENSUS STATEMENT | APRIL 2019

The influenza (flu) vaccine is one of the most effective preventive strategies against flu, a disease estimated to cause three to five million cases of severe illness and approximately 250,000 to 500,000 deaths around the world annually.

Data from the 2014-15 season shows low influenza vaccination rates among European countries, at 45.5% in older people and 49.8% in patients with chronic medical conditions. These low rates are seen to be the result of barriers such as complicated vaccination delivery processes, lack of vaccine surveillance, misconceptions about vaccination leading to vaccine hesitancy, and lack of targeted awareness campaigns geared toward influenza vaccination. While vaccination communications are unlikely to affect the behaviour of firm vaccine refusers, there is evidence that outreach to the vaccine-hesitant public ('fence-sitters') may have an impact on uptake.

Significant work across sectors and disciplines with special input from communication experts is essential to improve the cohesion of messaging aimed at raising awareness of influenza. This includes targeting vaccination public health messages to appropriate groups, assessing the frequency of messages, and exploring the nature and impact of message dissemination.

The 'Fighting the Flu through Targeted Awareness Campaigns' expert meeting brought together leading experts in vaccination, ageing, and public health with communications professionals skilled in researching, creating, evaluating and revising public health messages to ensure directed impact.

Experts in health and risk communications, social media messaging, data-driven content creation, and evaluation shared and learned about good practice on awareness-raising communication strategies and determined next steps to creating campaigns to improve influenza awareness and uptake.

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Collectively, delegates agreed to action on the following considerations:

- 1** Communications on influenza vaccination must be tailored to specific at-risk groups and local country needs to ensure messages positively impact behaviour. Campaigns must be creative, differentiated from past campaigns and specific toward this target group.
- 2** The dangers of influenza and the effectiveness of influenza vaccination must be continuously communicated to tackle the misconceptions around vaccination. Where episodic campaigns already exist, these should be connected to create a cohesive, ongoing influenza awareness campaign;
- 3** Influenza awareness campaigns should be systematically evaluated for their impact and based on these evaluations, campaigns should be revised for maximum influence within target groups;
- 4** eHealth literacy among target groups should be enhanced, ensuring that information being accessed is accurate, up-to-date and verified;
- 5** Older people should be involved in the co-creation of vaccination communications strategies, informing message development; and
- 6** Influenza awareness campaigns should work toward a common goal of understanding awareness-raising strategies that encourage action in addition to awareness, involving multidisciplinary work that includes professional organizations, government, the private sector, patients and healthcare professionals.

These considerations underpin a concerted effort by diverse stakeholders to invest in improving health outcomes in older people and at-risk groups. Stakeholders agree that improving influenza vaccination awareness through collaborative awareness-raising efforts requires increased understanding of, and responses to, diverse target populations with varying vaccination attitudes which have a direct impact on the choice to be vaccinated and resulting health outcomes in those most at risk.

References

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- [2] Rizzo, Caterina, Giovanni Rezza, and Walter Ricciardi. "Strategies in recommending influenza vaccination in Europe and US." *Human vaccines & immunotherapeutics* 14.3 (2018): 693-698.
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Meeting Delegates

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 **VACCINES FOR LIFE**