MEP INTEREST GROUP
ON LIFE-COURSE IMMUNISATION

Life course immunisation for healthier lives in Europe

MEETING REPORT

Honouring Professor Vytautas Usonis

Strengthening vaccine education literacy and trust across the life course

23 October 2026 Online meeting



Executive summary

On 23 October 2026, the European Parliament Interest Group on Life-course Immunisation convened a special meeting in memory of Professor Vytautas Usonis, a distinguished paediatrician, vaccination advocate and longstanding leader of the Coalition for Life-course Immunisation (CLCI).

Bringing together Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), scientific experts and public health advocates, the meeting explored how Europe can strengthen vaccine education, improve health literacy, counter misinformation and build public trust in vaccination throughout life.

Chaired by Gary Finnegan, Editor of Vaccines Today and CLCI Board Member, the meeting featured contributions from Interest Group Co-chairs MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis and MEP Tomislav Sokol, MEP Aurelijus Veryga, Professor Walter Ricciardi, Sandra Evans and former MEP Cyrus Engerer. MEP Liudas Mažylis also contributed a written tribute.

Discussions highlighted a persistent gap between growing recognition of life-course immunisation and its translation into effective national policies, accessible vaccination services and measurable coverage outcomes.

Preliminary findings from new CLCI research involving experts from 16 EU Member States reinforced this concern. Although life-course immunisation is increasingly discussed, its explicit incorporation into national policies remains limited, and adult vaccination strategies are frequently only partially developed.

Participants identified several priorities for European action:

- Strengthening vaccine and health literacy through education, trusted healthcare professionals and community engagement throughout life.
- Translating vaccination recommendations into accessible services, including greater integration into routine healthcare and chronic disease management.
- Improving adult vaccination data collection, including comparable, timely coverage data to support national and European policymaking.
- Addressing misinformation and disinformation through coordinated public health communication and stronger engagement with digital platforms.
- Advancing European cooperation, sharing successful national approaches and developing practical recommendations to support Member States.

The meeting concluded with a commitment to advancing Professor Usonis' vision of vaccination as a lifelong instrument of prevention, health equity and public protection.

Opening remarks and remembrance



Gary Finnegan

Welcome and moderation

Editor of Vaccines Today and CLCI Board Member

Meeting chair

Gary Finnegan welcomed participants and introduced the meeting as an opportunity to honour Professor Vytautas Usonis through a practical discussion of vaccine education, literacy and trust. He moderated the presentations and discussion, drawing attention to the gap between recommendations and funded delivery, the need for timely coverage data and the practical role of MEPs and civil society.

Professor Vytautas Usonis, who passed away in June 2026, was recognised throughout the meeting for his scientific leadership, dedication to children's health and unwavering commitment to vaccination throughout life.



MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis

Remembering Professor Usonis and advancing lifelong prevention

Member of the European Parliament for Lithuania and Interest Group Co-chair

In a personal video tribute, MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis reflected on their friendship and professional collaboration dating back to 1988, during Lithuania's transition towards independence. He described Professor Usonis as a scientist of exceptional integrity who had helped shape national immunisation programmes, educated generations of medical professionals and consistently advocated for evidence-based prevention.

Professor Usonis recognised that developing effective vaccines was only part of the challenge. Successful immunisation programmes also depended on people understanding, trusting and being able to access vaccination.

As early as 2002, he had published an accessible book explaining vaccines to families, recognising the importance of health literacy long before it became a prominent European policy priority.

MEP Andriukaitis emphasised that Professor Usonis viewed life-course immunisation as an issue of fundamental health equity: access to preventive healthcare should not depend on where someone lives or their ability to pay.

This commitment also underpinned the Interest Group's previous discussion on whether preventive medicine should be recognised as a human right.



MEP Tomislav Sokol

Vaccination as a lifelong investment in health

Member of the European Parliament for Croatia and Interest Group Co-chair

MEP Tomislav Sokol similarly acknowledged Professor Usonis' lasting contribution to vaccination policy, prevention and public education. He stressed that vaccination should be regarded as a lifelong investment in health rather than an intervention confined to childhood.

The meeting recognised that the most meaningful way to honour Professor Usonis would be to continue translating his scientific and policy vision into practical improvements in vaccination access, understanding and uptake across Europe.

Scientific perspective



Professor Walter Ricciardi

Education prevention and the full value of vaccination

Professor at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and Interest Group Scientific Chair

Professor Walter Ricciardi, Scientific Chair of the Interest Group, examined the relationship between vaccine education, prevention and the broader value of immunisation.

He emphasised that vaccination represents one of the most cost-effective healthcare interventions, generating benefits extending beyond disease prevention to healthcare sustainability, economic productivity and wider societal wellbeing.

However, despite substantial scientific evidence supporting vaccination, its full value is not consistently reflected in political priorities, healthcare budgets or public understanding.

Professor Ricciardi highlighted the different perspectives of stakeholders, including politicians, healthcare managers, professionals, patients and the public. Effective vaccination policy requires these interests to be aligned around a shared understanding of prevention's long-term benefits.

He advocated a multidimensional approach to assessing vaccination value, incorporating clinical, personal, allocative and societal benefits.

A further challenge concerns the delivery of vaccination throughout life. While childhood vaccination is generally supported by established programmes and schedules, adult vaccination often involves more fragmented delivery arrangements.

Professor Ricciardi argued for better integration of vaccination into routine primary care, specialist services and chronic disease management. Individuals with chronic conditions, older adults and immunocompromised patients should encounter coordinated vaccination recommendations and accessible opportunities for immunisation.

He also highlighted the gap between recommending vaccination and achieving meaningful coverage. The existence of national recommendations alone does not guarantee implementation, funding or uptake.

His central message was that scientific evidence, education, effective healthcare delivery and political engagement must work together to make life-course immunisation a practical reality.

Political perspectives on trust and public engagement



MEP Aurelijus Veryga

Communicating the benefits of vaccination

Member of the European Parliament for Lithuania

In a recorded contribution, MEP Aurelijus Veryga reflected on the substantial progress achieved through vaccination, from controlling infectious diseases to preventing certain cancers and supporting healthier ageing.

He also acknowledged increasing public distrust and the re-emergence of vaccine-preventable diseases, including measles, in parts of Europe.

Drawing on the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, MEP Veryga emphasised that ineffective public communication can contribute to vaccine hesitancy and undermine confidence in preventive technologies.

He called for greater involvement of patients, behavioural scientists, healthcare professionals and policymakers in developing vaccination communication strategies.

European institutions, he argued, must continue supporting scientific research and innovation while improving how evidence is communicated to the public.



Cyrus Engerer

Lessons from Malta on trust literacy and adult uptake

Former Member of the European Parliament for Malta

Former MEP Cyrus Engerer presented Malta as an example of the contrast between successful childhood immunisation and the challenges of maintaining vaccination uptake into adulthood.

He described Malta's strong childhood vaccination performance, noting that first-dose measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) coverage had recovered from 91% during the pandemic to 96% the following year.

However, he highlighted substantially lower adult vaccination uptake despite the availability of free vaccines through local healthcare services.

Figures cited during his intervention included influenza vaccination uptake below 20% among people aged over 60, pneumococcal vaccination below 10% during its first free season, and COVID-19 vaccination below 4%.

These contrasting outcomes illustrate how strong childhood immunisation programmes do not automatically translate into sustained adult vaccination.

Mr Engerer argued that public trust must be established and reinforced throughout life rather than addressed only when individuals are offered a vaccine.

Schools, workplaces, pharmacies, general practitioners and community organisations all have potential roles in maintaining public understanding and confidence.

He also described misinformation as a governance challenge, not simply a communication problem. In particular, he called for stronger action on digital platforms, including effective application of the EU Digital Services Act and greater public health involvement in addressing systemic risks.

Looking towards 2027, he proposed two concrete priorities: publishing comparable annual adult vaccination coverage data across EU Member States, disaggregated by age, and developing common European ambitions for adult vaccination uptake.

New research on life course immunisation policy



Sandra Evans

Life course immunisation policy across Europe

Director of Sandra Evans Health Policy Ltd and Secretariat of the MEP Interest Group

Sandra Evans, Director of Sandra Evans Health Policy Ltd and Secretariat of the MEP Interest Group, presented preliminary findings from a new research initiative examining the development and implementation of life-course immunisation policies across the European Union.

The research, developed by CLCI and SE Health Policy with expert input, sought perspectives from vaccination specialists across all 27 EU Member States. Responses were received from experts representing 16 countries, including individuals working in national immunisation technical advisory groups, ministries of health and academic institutions.

The research remains in development, and the findings presented were preliminary. They reflect expert assessments rather than independently verified measures of national policy implementation.

Growing awareness but limited policy integration

The findings suggested growing recognition of life-course immunisation across Europe, although significant differences remain between awareness, policy inclusion and practical implementation.

Among the 16 responding countries:

- Nine were described as increasingly discussing life-course immunisation.
- One, Cyprus, was described as having the concept well understood and embedded.
- Four were reported to have limited awareness.
- One was described as not understanding the concept, while one respondent was unable to assess the situation.

When examining whether life-course immunisation was reflected in national policy, three countries were reported to include it explicitly, while five considered it implicitly. Four were reported not to reflect it, with the remaining responses uncertain or mixed.

The findings highlight a distinction between recognising the importance of vaccination throughout life and establishing the policy frameworks needed to deliver it.

Adult vaccination strategies remain underdeveloped

The research further suggested that the translation of life-course immunisation into adult vaccination strategies remains uneven.

Only one responding country was described as having a clearly defined adult vaccination strategy, while 11 were reported to have strategies that were only partially developed.

A further concern related to vaccination coverage targets and measurable policy objectives.

Some countries were reported to have adult vaccination goals, but the picture was uneven and there was uncertainty about whether such goals were in place in some settings. The presentation highlighted the importance of clearly defined goals and time frames for communication, accountability and evaluation.

This represents a potential weakness for programme accountability, communication and evaluation.

Implications for vaccine literacy and trust

The research findings were directly relevant to the meeting's discussion of health literacy.

If national policies are unclear, vaccination targets are poorly communicated, or healthcare professionals are uncertain about eligibility and delivery arrangements, it becomes considerably more difficult to provide consistent information to the public.

Ms Evans argued that meaningful access to prevention depends not only on the availability of vaccination but also on whether individuals understand what is recommended, where they can receive it and whether they must pay.

She identified three areas for improvement: clearer and more accessible policy communication, greater integration of vaccination into routine healthcare, and improved collection and availability of vaccination coverage data.

The research is intended to support further policy analysis and provide an evidence base for future activities of the MEP Interest Group.

Discussion and practical European action

The moderated discussion focused on how scientific evidence, political engagement and European cooperation could help address these persistent challenges.

Countering misinformation through coordinated action

Participants recognised that public health institutions often struggle to respond to misinformation at the speed and scale at which it spreads.

Professor Ricciardi described a significant imbalance between organised misinformation networks and the resources available to healthcare professionals and public authorities.

He advocated a more coordinated response, including the development of shared tools, evidence and best practices that national, regional and local policymakers could adapt.

Cyrus Engerer similarly argued that misinformation should be addressed through both public health communication and the regulation of online environments, highlighting the influence of digital algorithms on public attitudes.

The discussion reinforced the importance of moving beyond reactive fact-checking towards sustained, proactive communication through trusted professionals and community organisations.

Improving European vaccination data

The availability of reliable, comparable and timely adult vaccination coverage data emerged as one of the meeting's strongest recurring themes.

Participants noted that adult vaccination data are frequently fragmented across regional health systems, providers and vaccination delivery settings.

In some countries, vaccination may be recommended but delivered outside a nationally coordinated programme, creating challenges for systematic data collection.

Ms Evans emphasised that improving European surveillance first requires stronger national data systems capable of capturing vaccinations across different healthcare settings.

Digital solutions and the European Health Data Space could potentially support more integrated collection and sharing of vaccination information.

However, participants stressed that the availability of technology alone is insufficient. Political commitment, national implementation and professional engagement are also needed.

The importance of timely information was particularly emphasised. Data that become available only several years after vaccination programmes have been implemented have limited value for real-time policy adjustment. Where feasible, more current, season-specific data would better support public health decision-making.

The role of MEPs and European institutions

Participants acknowledged that responsibility for organising and delivering healthcare remains primarily with Member States.

Nevertheless, the European Union has an important supporting role through cooperation, research, surveillance, sharing of good practices and relevant regulatory frameworks.

MEPs can contribute by maintaining political attention on prevention, encouraging greater transparency in vaccination data and facilitating cooperation between national and European stakeholders.

Mr Engerer highlighted opportunities for parliamentary engagement across public health and other policy areas, including digital governance.

Professor Ricciardi emphasised the value of providing policymakers with practical, evidence-based solutions that can be adapted within existing national systems.

The discussion also acknowledged opportunities to connect vaccination policy with broader European priorities, including healthy ageing, chronic disease prevention and cardiovascular health.

Priorities for the MEP Interest Group in 2027

Drawing on the presentations and discussion, several potential areas of work emerged for the Interest Group's future programme.

1 Advance comparable adult vaccination data

Encourage improvements in national adult vaccination monitoring and support efforts towards more consistent European reporting, including coverage by age and risk group.

2 Identify and share successful national policies

Develop opportunities for experts and policymakers to exchange practical examples of effective vaccination policies, service delivery models and interventions addressing low uptake.

3 Strengthen vaccination literacy and trusted communication

Promote collaboration between healthcare professionals, educators, patient organisations and community stakeholders to improve understanding of vaccination across different stages of life.

4 Support evidence-based responses to misinformation

Explore opportunities to share communication resources and effective interventions, alongside greater engagement with European digital policy frameworks.

5 Translate research into policy recommendations

Use the Interest Group's emerging research programme to identify policy gaps, develop actionable recommendations and support informed discussions with national and European policymakers.

6 Maintain dialogue between scientific experts and political decision-makers

Continue providing a forum where scientific evidence, experience from Member States and political perspectives can inform practical approaches to improving immunisation throughout life.

These priorities reflect proposals raised during the meeting and opportunities identified from the discussion. They do not represent a formally adopted work programme.

Closing tribute and conclusions



MEP Liudas Mažylis

Closing tribute to Professor Usonis

Member of the European Parliament for Lithuania

In a written tribute read by Gary Finnegan, MEP Liudas Mažylis remembered Professor Usonis as a highly respected expert and a dedicated advocate for vaccination, public health and science-based education. He recalled their agreement, around a year earlier, to work together on these shared goals. Although they would no longer be able to realise those plans together, Professor Usonis' ideas, dedication and work would continue to inspire joint efforts.

Continuing Professor Usonis' legacy

The meeting demonstrated a shared commitment to strengthening vaccination as a foundation of prevention, healthy ageing and health equity across Europe.

While awareness of life-course immunisation has grown, its translation into effective national policies, accessible services, trusted communication and measurable vaccination outcomes remains incomplete.

The contributions highlighted that improving vaccine confidence is not simply a matter of providing more information. It requires healthcare systems and policymakers to communicate clearly, remove barriers to access, involve trusted community voices and demonstrate the benefits of vaccination through reliable evidence and transparent reporting.

Professor Ricciardi concluded by emphasising that progress depends on continued collaboration between science and politics. Scientific evidence provides the foundation for effective interventions, but political leadership is necessary to translate that evidence into sustainable action.

The meeting closed with appreciation for all contributions and a shared determination to carry Professor Usonis' vision forward.