



2024-2025

Vision & Strategic Approach to Adult Immunisation in Ireland

Position Paper

Executive Summary

Vaccination is recognised as one of the most significant public health interventions, second only to clean water, in preventing disease. Vaccines are available for over 20-life threatening diseases, underscoring their critical role in public health and universal health coverage¹. A 2024 study by The Lancet highlights the impact of immunisation, which has saved an estimated 154 million lives over the past 50 years, or six lives every minute². The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the importance of vaccines, with COVID-19 vaccines reducing deaths by at least 57% in the WHO European Region since December 2020³ and saving an estimated 9,571 lives in Ireland between 2020 and 2023⁴.

While vaccination programmes have traditionally focused on paediatric populations, there is a growing recognition of the need to bridge the vaccine gap for adults. The WHO's Immunisation Agenda 2030 envisions a world where everyone benefits from vaccines at every age¹. A 'life course' approach to immunisation is becoming more common, emphasising immunisation at all life stages and ensuring the successes of childhood vaccination extend to adults⁵.

In Ireland, while some vaccines, like the seasonal influenza and pneumococcal vaccines, are recommended for adults, there is an absence of a comprehensive, integrated strategic approach to adult immunisation, potentially leading to gaps in coverage, inconsistency in vaccine uptake, and missed opportunities for disease prevention.

The importance of an effective adult immunisation strategy in Ireland is paramount for several reasons....



Ireland has one of the fastest ageing populations in Europe⁶, with the >65+ population predicted to double, reaching 1.6 million by 2051⁷



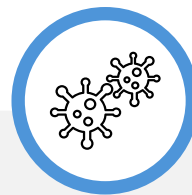
The incidence of chronic diseases are increasing rapidly in Ireland, with 74% of >58-year-olds living with comorbidities⁸



With healthcare utilisation and costs rising⁹, it is cheaper to prevent rather than treat disease



Comprehensive adult immunisation programmes could save up to €23 for every €1 spent in Ireland¹⁰



Anti-microbial resistance is a significant threat, with 35k deaths annually in the EU due to antibiotic resistant infections¹¹



~300 vaccines are in development worldwide¹², with 80% of these efforts aimed towards adults¹³

The benefits of adult immunisation include:

- Improvements in population health by preventing vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) and associated mortality;
- A reduction in healthcare costs and resource use, and net savings within healthcare systems; and
- Increases in societal productivity and economic gains by keeping individuals and their caregivers healthy¹⁴.

A recent report, which evaluated the full implementation of NIAC recommendations for influenza, pneumococcal disease, herpes zoster, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), estimated that these programmes could prevent approximately 376,000 disease cases, avoid 74,000 hospitalisations, and avert around 1,400 disease-related deaths in Ireland¹⁰. In this context, vaccines are a crucial component of preventative health strategies within healthcare systems. By investing in adult immunisation, Ireland can significantly enhance the quality of life for its aging population and greatly reduce the strain on its health system by prioritising disease prevention.



Vision For Ireland'

Aligned with the WHO's Immunisation Agenda 2030 (IA2030), this paper sets out the vision for **'an Ireland where everyone, everywhere, at every age, fully benefits from vaccines for good health and well-being'**.

In order to recognise this vision, we recommend **the development of a comprehensive national immunisation strategy for Ireland, promoting a life-course framework and a whole-of-government approach to immunisation**, focusing on four strategic priorities:



Build Trustworthy Vaccination Programmes

The first priority is to build trustworthy vaccination programmes grounded in informed consent and transparent, evidence-based information. This involves resourcing the Health Service Executive's (HSE's) National Immunisation Office (NIO) to standardise vaccine messaging, create accessible information on vaccination schedules, and promote vaccine literacy through educational campaigns. Additionally, the report recommends the recommencement of the National Vaccine Alliance to foster evidence-based communication on adult immunisation. Funding should be allocated to research public attitudes towards immunisation and combat misinformation and communication on immunisation should be integrated into existing HSE programmes. Furthermore, a consistent approach to education on immunisation should be adopted in undergraduate courses and continuing professional development for healthcare professionals (HCPs). The benefits of immunisation should be communicated as part of school curricula. Transparency in vaccine safety monitoring should be promoted, and a vaccine injury redress programme should be established with clear legal frameworks and eligibility criteria.



Ensure Equitable Access to Immunisation

The second priority focuses on ensuring equitable access to adult immunisation, reflecting the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) recommendations and addressing the diverse needs of the whole population. A whole-of-government approach is recommended to engage underserved populations and ensure equitable access across all demographic groups. Immunisation champions should be designated in each HSE Health Region to ensure cohesive communication and implementation of immunisation programmes. A service delivery model prioritising equitable access should be developed, offering multiple entry points to vaccination, including pharmacies, workplaces, hospitals, and mobile clinics. Vaccination plans should be created and regularly updated, leveraging quantitative and qualitative data, including from existing networks and patient advocacy groups. A more coordinated approach to vaccination of immunocompromised individuals should be developed, including clear guidelines for HCPs. The vaccinator workforce should be developed with flexibility and agility in mind and a standardised approach to training and accreditation should be developed for all vaccinators.



Leverage a Data-Driven Approach

The third priority is to leverage a data-driven approach to immunisation, utilising accurate vaccination and population data to empower individuals and inform public health decision-making. A comprehensive immunisation information system should be implemented, integrating data from all appropriate settings and providing access to individual vaccination records. A reminder and recall messaging system should be instituted to prompt individuals for vaccination based on age, medical history, and other criteria. Vaccination data should be integrated with demographic and clinical information for detailed analysis and targeted promotion to specific cohorts of people. Access to timely vaccination data should be ensured to guide effective service delivery and rapid public health response to emerging threats. The Health Information Bill should be progressed and the integration of immunisation data within the planned Shared Care Record and/or Electronic Health Records (EHRs) should be prioritised, as should the inclusion of an immunisation module on the HSE's Patient App.



Position Ireland for Future Vaccine Innovations

The fourth priority aims to position Ireland optimally for future vaccine innovations, supporting public health and the sustainability of the healthcare system and wider economy. A sustainable funding model for the adult immunisation programme should be agreed upon, removing financial barriers and ensuring appropriate support for healthcare providers who participate in immunisation. NIAC should be recognised as a National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) to align with European and WHO standards. A formal horizon scanning process should be established, with the NIAC, NIO and Department of Health (DoH) publishing an updated immunisation roadmap on accessible platforms, ensuring transparency for all stakeholders. A streamlined process for faster decision-making on funding for adult vaccines should be developed, incorporating a flexible health technology assessment (HTA) process that considers the wider societal benefits of vaccines. Key performance indicators (KPIs) should be developed and monitored to track strategy implementation and programme performance. Finally, robust outbreak response and pandemic preparedness should be ensured through proactive surveillance, health protection resource allocation, and cross-sector collaboration.

By implementing these recommendations, Ireland can develop a comprehensive national approach to adult immunisation, enhancing public health and protecting the most vulnerable populations.

¹ World Health Organisation, "Immunisation Agenda 2030: A global strategy to leave no one behind," WHO, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/immunization-agenda-2030-a-global-strategy-to-leave-no-one-behind>. [Accessed November 2024].

² A. J. Shattock, H. Johnson and S. Y. Sim, "Contribution of vaccination to improved survival and health: modelling 50 years of the Expanded Programme on Immunization," *The Lancet*, vol. 403, no. 10441, pp. 2307-2316, 2024.

³ World Health Organization, "COVID-19 vaccinations have saved more than 1.4 million lives in the WHO European Region, a new study finds," 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/16-01-2024-covid-19-vaccinations-have-saved-more-than-1.4-million-lives-in-the-who-european-region-a-new-study-finds#:~:text=Since%20their%20introduction%20in%20December,SARS%2DCoV%2D2%20virus>. [Accessed November 2024].

⁴ M. M. I. Meslé and et al, "Estimated number of lives directly saved by COVID-19 vaccination programmes in the WHO European Region from December, 2020, to March, 2023: a retrospective surveillance study," *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, vol. 12, pp. 714-27, 2024.

⁵ The Health Policy Partnership, "A life-course approach to vaccination: adapting European policies," 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://www.healthpolicypartnership.com/app/uploads/A-life-course-approach-to-vaccination-adapting-European-policies.pdf>. [Accessed November 2024].

⁶ Department of Health, "Health in Ireland Key Trends 2022," Government of Ireland, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/241598/8a6472b4-83cf-45ec-88c9-023e0c321d8c.pdf#>. [Accessed November 2024].

⁷ Older Persons Information Hub, "Press Statement Older Persons Information Hub 2024," Central Statistics Office, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2024pressreleases/pressstatementolderpersonsinformationhub2024/#:~:text=CSO%20Older%20Persons%20Information%20Hub,to%201.6%20million%20by%202051>. [Accessed November 2024].

⁸ TILDA, "The Older Population of Ireland on the Eve of the COVID-19 pandemic," TILDA, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://tilda.tcd.ie/publications/reports/W5KeyFindings/index.php>. [Accessed November 2024].

⁹ OECD (2022), *OECD Economic Surveys: Ireland 2022*, OECD Publishing, Paris. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1787/46a6ea85-en>. [Accessed November 2024].

¹⁰ Office of Health Economics, "The Value of Adult Vaccination in Ireland," OHE, Dublin, 2024.

¹¹ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, "Antibiotic resistance: a growing threat to human health,". [Online]. Available: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/antibiotic-resistance-growing-threat-human-health>. [Accessed November 2024].

¹² Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, "Vaccines in Development: 2024 Report," PhRMA, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://phrma.org/resource-center/Topics/Medicines-in-Development/Medicines-in-Development-for-Vaccines-2024-Report>. [Accessed November 2024].

¹³ Vaccines Europe, "Vaccines Europe Pipeline Review 2022," Vaccines Europe, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.vaccineseurope.eu/vaccines-ecosystem/vaccines-pipeline/>. [Accessed November 2024].

¹⁴ Office of Health Economics, "The Socioeconomic Value of Adult Immunisation Programmes," 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ohe.org/publications/the-socio-economic-value-of-adult-immunisation-programmes/>. [Accessed November 2024].