



Commentary

The Adult Immunization Board (AIB): A new platform to provide multidisciplinary guidelines for the implementation and optimization of adult immunization in Europe

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1. Background

People can be at risk of getting and spreading serious vaccine-preventable infectious diseases throughout their lives and can therefore benefit from a lifelong approach to vaccination [1,2]. While traditionally national immunization programs have focused primarily on vaccines for infants and school-aged children, in recent years adult vaccination programs (including e.g., pregnant women, travelers, immunocompromised, health care providers and older adults) have received increasing attention in many countries [3,4]. However, even in countries with adult vaccination recommendations, vaccination coverage among the above-mentioned target groups remains often low. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of adult vaccination became more than apparent to several national health governments, which urgently had to set up adult vaccination programs and infrastructures to administer COVID-19 vaccines to an unprecedentedly wide target population. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased global attention to the need of providing vaccination to all age groups (and, in particular, adult age groups), but also highlighted challenges and deficiencies in approaches to achieve higher uptake of vaccination [5,6]. Several organizations, including governments, (inter)national public health organizations and vaccine manufacturers are currently considering how adult immunization can be further extended to include additional diseases, and how it can be

implemented, in order to increase its impact, and guarantee a lifelong approach to vaccination. Although many organizations are committed to promote adult vaccination, until present there was no independent multidisciplinary information and discussion platform focusing on this topic in a comprehensive way at the European level.

In order to fill this gap, a group of European experts in the field of adult vaccination established the Adult Immunization Board (AIB) in 2022.

2. The structure and purpose of the AIB

The AIB is an independent, international, multidisciplinary group of recognized experts in the field of adult immunization established with the aim of contributing to the reduction of the impact of vaccine-preventable infections and diseases in European adults. Apart from academia and national health authorities, representatives from international organizations (like WHO-EURO) joined the Board as observers. The primary goal is to provide evidence-based guidance on fundamental technical and strategic issues, while monitoring the progress of adult immunization programs at European and (sub)national level. The AIB works in line with the European Immunization [7] (EIA2030) [7]. The function and structure of the Board are derived from the successful track record and extensive experience of the Viral Hepatitis Prevention Board (VHPB), which was established in 1992 [8], and the HPV Prevention and

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Control Board (HPV Board), established in 2015 [9].

2.1. Way of working of the AIB

In line with the VHPB and HPV Board, the AIB organizes 2 meetings per year, one technical and one country meeting with relevant stakeholders:

- Technical meetings are organized to discuss specific topics on adult immunization among advisors of the board, together with subject-matter experts (example of potential topics: the burden of disease brought by adult infections, tailored vaccine services and communication for adults, electronic vaccine registries, adult immunization schedules, adult immunization implementation, vaccine equity, coadministration of vaccines etc.).
- Country meetings are organized to discuss country/region-specific aspects of adult immunization together with local experts. During these meetings, the board invites local academics, health care professionals, public health representatives and policy makers to present on adult immunization strategies implemented in the country where the meeting is organized, as well as educational and communicative initiatives aimed at increasing adult vaccine acceptance and coverage rates. The aim of these meetings is to establish a collaborative network of national experts of different fields, creating a platform for the exchange of knowledge and best practices in adult immunization.

The new board brings together different multi-disciplinary stakeholders in the adult immunization field on specific scientific and programmatic issues. In this way, it fosters liaisons and interchanges among individuals and/or collectives to discuss challenges and opportunities related to adult immunization. By listening to each other, discussing and summarizing different topics, the Board functions as a knowledge and learning network that can support stakeholders in their everyday work to implement and optimize adult immunization. The AIB approach offers an opportunity for participants to engage in knowledge-sharing activities, enabling the exchange of ideas, projects, and experiences across different disciplines and borders, and promoting a more informed and coherent strategy towards the advancement of adult vaccination efforts in Europe.

2.2. (Upcoming) meetings and activities

In November 2022, the AIB secretariat organized a kick-off meeting with experts to establish the basic structure/functions of the board, discuss the main objectives, and plan future meetings. The new platform was well received and endorsed as an appropriate and effective way to share information and exchange ideas and experiences across disciplines and borders.

In April 2023, the AIB organized its first technical meeting on “Assessing the health burden of vaccine-preventable infections in European Adults: challenges and opportunities” in Antwerp (Belgium) [11]. In December 2023, the first AIB country meeting is planned in Florence, Italy, with local experts to learn about best practices and address aspects to improve.

All information presented at AIB meetings and guidelines/ recommendations issued by the board are available on the website: www.adultimmunizationboard.org [10]; meeting reports will be published in peer-reviewed journals.

2.3. AIB secretariat

The AIB has a permanent organizing and scientific secretariat based at the Universities of Antwerp (led by Prof. Pierre Van Damme) and Florence (led by Prof. Paolo Bonanni), in Belgium and in Italy, respectively. The establishment of a permanent secretariat for the AIB plays a

crucial role in ensuring the resilience of the board and the continuity in future years, as it is responsible for coordinating the Board’s activities, funding, and ensuring that all relevant information is gathered, processed, and disseminated efficiently.

The executive secretariat of the Adult Immunization Board benefits from being seated at the University of Antwerp and the University of Florence, where it has the infrastructure and administrative services of the universities at its disposal. The AIB presently receives unrestricted financial backing from Vaccines Europe through a three-year grant to facilitate its operations and meetings. The AIB secretariat handles the collection of funds for meetings. Meeting topics, organization and editorial control of the output and website rests entirely with the AIB advisors and the executive secretariat according to all ethical rules of both Universities. For the Board and its advisors, strict operational and scientific independence is essential. AIB advisors and invited experts only get travel and subsistence reimbursement, without receiving any monetary compensation.

3. Conclusion

The combination of an enthusiastic and highly qualified team of advisors together with a permanent secretariat is a vital aspect of the AIB’s structure that will help to ensure its success and effectiveness in the field of adult immunization. The AIB secretariat and AIB advisors look forward to working with different stakeholders in the coming years to unlock the full potential of the available and future adult vaccines in Europe.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: AIB reports financial support was provided by Vaccines Europe.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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