Investing in productive economies and resilient societies:
The vital role of adult immunization

IFPMA

As populations age and rates of non-communicable diseases rise across all demographics, adult immunization represents a high-impact and cost-effective investment in economic growth and societal resilience – delivering an average return on investment of 19 to 1. Advances in vaccine science continue to enhance protection for adult populations against a wider range of vaccine preventable diseases, offering governments new tools to strengthen economic resilience and public health. By safeguarding workforce productivity, strengthening fiscal stability and enhancing economic competitiveness, adult immunization programs equip policy decision-makers with a proven tool to support sustainable growth. Yet systematic underinvestment persists, leaving economies exposed to avoidable costs, fiscal volatility and lost output. Decisive policy action is needed to prioritize adult immunization within national budgets, allowing governments to invest in healthy longevity.

The Shared Challenge - Public budgets are under strain as demographic pressures grow, reinforcing the need for high-return public health investments.

Revenues are under pressure due to stagnant productivity and slower growth.

- Annual productivity growth has fallen to below 1% in advanced economies.[1]
- This economic slowdown is driven in part by an aging workforce – a trend that targeted public health investments can help address.[2]

Expenditures are rising with healthcare and pension costs.[3]

- Fiscal budgets are increasingly stretched by age-related expenditures.[4]
  - Healthcare spending is increasing as populations age,[5] driven in part by rising rates of non-communicable diseases and multi-morbidities among older adults.[6,7]
  - Pension sustainability is under threat as contribution rates struggle to keep up with the growing size of the retired population and longer benefit durations.[8]

In this context, investments that protect workforce participation and reduce unplanned health expenditure offer governments a direct lever to strengthen economic and fiscal resilience.

The Opportunity - Immunization represents an untapped opportunity to reduce fiscal pressure.

Aging workforces are more vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) such as respiratory infections,[9] where effective preventive tools remain under-utilized.

- For example, adults with cardiovascular disease are 10 times more likely to suffer a heart attack after contracting influenza.[10]
- Premature mortality from NCDs is estimated to cost EU economies around €437.7 billion annually through lost productivity – a significant share of which is potentially mitigable through immunization.[11]

Health systems can avoid much VPD-related expenditure through vaccination.[12,13]

- Severe VPD seasons and episodic outbreak surges, particularly for respiratory infections affecting older adults, lead to unplanned expenditures and productivity losses.[14]

The current underinvestment in adult immunization carries real fiscal risk – but one that proven, cost-effective interventions can directly address.[15]

- Underinvestment raises the probability of unplanned spending spikes and revenue shortfalls, amplifying fiscal volatility and complicating government debt sustainability.[15]

The economic case for action is compelling across OECD economies.

In Europe, the annual economic burden of adult pneumococcal diseases is estimated at about €13 billion, of which roughly €4.75 billion stems from **lost productivity.**[16]

In the United States, the combined costs of influenza ($5.79 billion), herpes zoster ($782 million), and pneumococcal disease ($1.86 billion) add up to nearly $8.5 billion annually.[13]

In Brazil, pneumococcal disease hospitalizations accounted for average annual costs of around USD-PPP 3 million, with significantly higher costs among adults aged 60 and older.[17]

In the UK, respiratory VPDs cost employers approximately £44 billion every year – or £852 per employee.[18]

In Australia, respiratory VPDs in adults cost more than AUD $2 billion annually.[19]

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[19] Lung Foundation Australia (2024). Vital vaccines for Australian adults.

The Value of Adult Immunization - Adult immunization is a cost-effective investment in economic growth and system resilience.[20]

Among available preventive health investments, adult immunization stands out for its combination of strong evidence base, established delivery infrastructure and rapid returns, offering measurable fiscal and economic benefits within annual budget cycles.

Safeguarding productivity and economic growth – protecting labor supply, sustaining high-value tax contributions, and strengthening international competitiveness.[20]

Reducing short- and long-term health expenditures – averting costly hospitalizations and emergency visits during seasonal surges and episodic outbreak-related peaks in the short term, as well as the trajectory of care expenditure in the long term.[20]

Increasing societal resilience – strengthening health equity by protecting vulnerable populations and underserved communities,[20] preparedness for future threats and community well-being.[21]

Building on scientific advances and innovation – broadening the range of vaccine-preventable diseases in adults, creating new opportunities to reduce disease burden, lower costs and strengthen system resilience.[22]

Providing a high return on investment with limited budget impact – in the context of rising healthcare expenditure, including growing long-term care costs, increasing investment in adult immunization would have a relatively limited budget impact, given OECD countries currently spend minimal sums on prevention and immunization.[23,24]

ADULT IMMUNIZATION IS HIGHLY COST-EFFECTIVE, WITH AN AVERAGE RETURN ON INVESTMENT OF 19:1.[20]

The Solution - An immunized adult population mitigates fiscal, economic, and societal risk.

- **Through direct fiscal savings** – reducing healthcare expenditure, social transfers, and protecting tax revenues through fewer emergency visits, overtime and surge costs, and preserved elective procedures.[20]
- **Through broader economic gains** – safeguarding productivity, formal and informal labor supply (including unpaid caregiving that enables workforce participation of working-age family members)[25] and economic output through sustained earnings, household consumption and corporate activity.[20]
- **Through wider socioeconomic benefits** – delivering improved health outcomes, quality of life and societal resilience.[20]

OUR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a strong economic case to ensure adult immunization is prioritized within national budgets and governments invest in healthy longevity:

1. Endorse adult immunization programs as a strategic economic investment.

- Recognize adult immunization as a form of **public infrastructure that enables economic growth and fiscal sustainability.**
- Embed adult immunization as a **risk mitigation tool** in national economic and fiscal policies.
- Frame immunization as an **investment in resilience priorities** – not as a competing budget line.

2. Integrate performance-based funding and proportionate economic evidence into investment appraisals.

- Evaluate adult immunization using strategic investment criteria, including productivity effects, fiscal impact and societal resilience benefits.
- Fund programs based on **expected and progressively demonstrated value** – combining ex ante evidence such as international data and modeling with ex post monitoring to validate outcomes and strengthen future budget cases.
- Incorporate **proportionate, decision-fit economic evidence into spending reviews** – drawing on broader metrics beyond cost-effectiveness, including productivity effects, fiscal impact and distributional outcomes. Strengthen the evidence base over time through real-world data as programs are implemented.

3. Treat adult immunization expenditure as a capital-like preventive investment and fiscal stabilizer, which generates multi-year economic and fiscal returns.

- **Recognize immunization as a fiscal stabilizer** that reduces unplanned hospital expenditures and preserves labor supply from shocks.
- **Account for its long-term multi-year returns** in mitigating structural spending pressures and supporting debt sustainability.
- **Ensure adult immunization is reflected within existing medium-term fiscal and health planning frameworks,** such as multi-year expenditure ceilings, national health strategies or medium-term fiscal plans, so that its fiscal and economic benefits are considered in forward planning.

4. Enable effective implementation and uptake to realize the full value of adult immunization investments.

- **Funding alone is insufficient** – fiscal and economic returns depend on achieving high coverage rates.
- Invest in targeted measures to support delivery of immunization through the life course, ensuring adult immunization is fully embedded within existing systems. Mechanisms include vaccine delivery systems and infrastructure, broader reimbursement coverage and strengthened data collection including vaccine coverage reporting and surveillance systems.

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