



MINISTRY OF HEALTH
OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC



**Reasonable
Europe**

Czech Presidency
of the Visegrad Group
2019/2020

Programme of the Czech Presidency
to the Visegrad Group
Healthcare area

Foreword by the Minister of Health of the Czech Republic

Adam Vojtěch



At the beginning of July 2019, the Czech Republic takes over the presidency to the Visegrad group and it is my pleasure to present you the programme of the Czech Presidency in the area of healthcare. We have designed an ambitious but also pragmatic content. The motto of the Czech presidency is V4Reasonable Europe and we have approached our programme with that in mind. In the area of healthcare we would like to focus on ongoing projects introduced by our predecessors but also on new domains of cooperation.

The issue of **human resources in the health sector** runs through the V4 presidencies like a red thread. The Czech Republic cannot omit this topic as all V4 countries are struggling with a lack of medical and nursing staff. **Increasingly expensive medicines** are another problem we share and we are determined to move forward cooperation in this field as well. In this respect, we are bound to fulfil the objectives of the memorandum we have recently signed in Warsaw. We should strain our effort to information and popularization campaigns promoting **vaccination** as one of the biggest invention of the modern era, since in Europe, there is a steady decrease in the population's vaccination rates.

The **use of data** is a domain discussed repeatedly at international fora. International standards in the field of clinical terminology and classifications

facilitate exchange and comparison of data. The unified use of classifications, such as the **ICD-11**, has enormous potential to achieve significant savings in cooperation with health insurers.

We would also like to elaborate on the outcomes of the 6th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Ostrava in 2017, as up to 15% of deaths in the WHO European Region are caused by **diseases connected to the environment**.

Last but not least, the Czech presidency will try to point out that **patient is, first and foremost, a human being**. We plan to organise the V4+ conference dealing with the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine.

The main goal we would like to achieve is a broader collaboration with many stakeholders, not only among ministries of health. This is the reason why we have incorporated shared meetings with Ministry of Environment, with the WHO, with the Council of Europe or with the Beneluxa initiative in our presidency programme.

Dear V4 colleagues, I believe we have created a team which is able to work tirelessly for better healthcare of our patients and sustainability of our healthcare systems. I look forward to the new period of the Visegrad cooperation under our presidency and to welcoming you in the Czech Republic in November 2019 and June 2020.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'AGH', is located at the bottom right of the page.

I Human resources in the health sector

This theme runs through the presidencies like a red thread. All the V4 countries are struggling with a lack of medical and nursing staff. The exchange of experience in this area, sharing examples of good practice, etc. may therefore be useful. The Ministry of Health established the Working Group on Personnel Stabilization and Recruitment of Healthcare Employees, the task of which is to prepare a conceptual approach to this problem. During the presidency, a strategy could be introduced on how the Czech Republic will try to cope with the lack of workforce in medical and nursing professions. Subsequent discussion of the V4 countries on the document could provide additional impulse and contribute to its improvement. Regular evaluation of similar V4 strategies could be envisaged as a part of negotiations.

Events organized:

- Expert meeting – September 2019
- Expert meeting (tentative) – February 2020

I Human resources in the health sector

The Czech Republic, as well as the rest of the V4, seeks to address the shortage of workforce in healthcare both in medical and non-medical professions.

Migration waves are often caused by low financial rewards and increased administrative burdens compared to some neighboring countries and other sectors. The issue of administrative burdens for physicians seeking to achieve full medical qualifications is an especially burning one.

In order to increase human resources stability and mitigate the impact of factors contributing to the migration of healthcare professionals, a systemic solution is needed that will focus not merely on wages, but also on other determinants.

Another problem is the inadequate age profile of doctors across the V4. A clear priority should be increased production of general medicine graduates and improvement of the education model.

The situation is even more serious in case of nurses. Here, emigration flows also play a role, with nursing staff from the V4 countries heading to Germany, Austria, the UK or Ireland.

The V4 countries have previously shared experience with setting up their residency programs. This discussion has proven to be beneficial as, thanks to the right set-up of incentives, graduates can be retained on the domestic labor market for the money the country spent on their education and training.

The Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic could present a concept for addressing the shortage of human resources, developed by a special working group. In addition, the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic set up a register of healthcare professionals in 2017, which will serve as a source of relevant information on human resources in the health sector. We hope to gain more incentives for the commenced activities and their improvement from the discussion.



II Drug policy

Drug policy is another topic in which we intend to build on previously established cooperation. Increasingly expensive medicines represent a problem for the sustainability of any healthcare system. The Polish presidency in 2016-2017 presented a Memorandum of Understanding between the V4 states that could help to find a solution in the form of joint negotiation on prices. In this very first phase, the Czech Republic ended up not signing the initiative, but on the 15th of May 2019, the renewed Memorandum of Understanding was signed and from now, all the V4 countries + Lithuania are on board. The Czech side even suggested cooperation on a wider basis – with the Beneluxa initiative.

Events organized:

- Expert meeting – September 2019
- Expert meeting – February 2020

II Drug policy

Each state is responsible for providing healthcare on its territory. One of the elements of healthcare provision is to guarantee the availability of medicinal products. The V4 countries are confronted with situations where medicinal products are delivered to the country in order for the marketing authorization holder to fulfill its legal obligations, but are subsequently distributed abroad (and not to domestic pharmacies) under significantly more favorable financial conditions for purely economic reasons. This then results in an acute shortage of medicinal products on the domestic market. Based on the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Fair and Affordable Pricing of Medicinal Products signed on the 15th of May 2019 in Warsaw, the Czech Ministry of Health would also welcome a broader cooperation with the Beneluxa initiative. This would offer the opportunity to hold expert meetings in the format V4 + representatives of the Beneluxa initiative.

At the meeting, the Czech Republic would like to discuss recently implemented or undergoing reforms and share experience and examples of good and bad practice. An amendment to the Law on Pharmaceuticals was adopted in 2017, aimed at streamlining market regulation and creating a system for monitoring and evaluating the threat of unavailability of medicines for patients in the Czech Republic. However, the need for new legislative standards is evident from subsequent market developments.



III Meeting of the Chief Medical Officers

A meeting of the V4 Chief Medical Officers should be an integral and indispensable part of every V4 presidency. In relation to the recent epidemic of measles, which has affected almost all European countries, one of the possible topics of their meeting is maintaining a sufficient degree of vaccination coverage in compulsory vaccinations and increasing vaccination rates for non-compulsory vaccination. Antivaccination campaigns and attitudes of the various groups fighting against vaccination represent the main problem. These groups are gaining strength in the V4 region, and if the V4 member states can formulate a functioning and understandable communication strategy complemented by legislative measures, significant positive results can be achieved. In this respect, the Czech Republic is working on the drafting of a law to compensate those who have suffered harm in connection with compulsory vaccination, as well as preparing an information portal on vaccination. V4 Meetings could be a good platform for exchanging experience in our region. Another possible topic could be the cross-border sharing of relevant information and experience as an example of this cooperation between Nordic countries.

Event organized:

- Meeting of the Chief Medical Officers – February 2020

III Meeting of the Chief Medical Officers

In Europe, there is a steady decrease in the population's vaccination rates, resulting, for example, in the recent measles epidemic. Specifically for this disease, it would be advisable to identify the key aspects that are the cause of this decline and to focus on the strategy of increasing the vaccination rates not only in the field of compulsory vaccination but also with regard to recommended vaccination of risk population groups (e.g. seniors) in which the overall vaccination rate is very low.

Antivaccination campaigns and the associated growing distrust of vaccination go beyond national borders. It is therefore necessary to jointly share relevant and comprehensible information with professional and general public, for example, through information campaigns and popularization campaigns promoting vaccination.

Issue of very low vaccination rates for non-compulsory vaccinations, such as influenza or pneumococcus, especially in risk population groups, is a common problem of the V4 countries. The V4 countries have long been below the EU average in this segment.

Another topic for the Chief Medical Officers should be the sharing of information, experience and knowledge among the V4 countries in cross-border cooperation and cooperation in addressing different situations related to the free movement of persons. Given the globalization and migration routes, there is also a need for increased control and supervision of persons coming from potentially risky areas, i.e. those with a significantly higher incidence of infectious diseases rarely occurring in the V4 countries. One example is tuberculosis among foreign workers working in the V4 countries.

The meeting of the Chief Medical Officers should also serve to establish direct contacts, including at the level of individual working teams.



IV WHO International Classification of Diseases

The 11th revised version of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) was approved by the World Health Assembly in May 2019 and will enter into force in 2022. It represents a significant change in the configuration of classification after about 30 years and it is therefore in the interest of all states to be well prepared for its implementation. The Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic (IHIS CR) is intensifying cooperation with the WHO in the field of clinical classifications and terminology in a wider context, with the view of establishing the WHO Collaborating Center. One of the main activities of this Collaborating Center would be the preparation and implementation of ICD-11 in the Czech Republic and the dissemination of awareness of this revision in the V4 region. Countries can achieve significant savings, control and improvement of healthcare quality and simplified implementation of e-health projects thanks to correctly established processes in coding and recording of medical information.

Events organized:

- Expert meeting – in the presence of the WHO representatives, October 2019
- KlasifiKon Conference – organized by the IHIS CR, October 2019
- Expert meeting – in the presence of the WHO representatives, March 2020

IV WHO International Classification of Diseases

International standards in the field of clinical terminology and classifications enable semantic interoperability, facilitate their exchange and comparison of health data at individual, regional, national and international level. The 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 11) will enter into force in 2022. It is certain that the transition to ICD-11 will be time-consuming, cost-intensive and staff-demanding for most countries. Although this change in the international standard comes nearly after 30 years (ICD-10 was introduced in 1990), some WHO Member States have only recently fully implemented the 10th revision of the ICD.

Changes in reporting and transition to ICD-11 will be a long-term process, and a way to implement, plan and fund the transition must be established. In particular, data transfer systems between providers, payers and statistical processing systems (change of data interfaces and information systems) should be taken into account. It is necessary to provide translation, publication, public awareness and education and training of the persons concerned (coders, doctors, administrators, analysts).

Despite all the pitfalls, the unified use of ICD-11 has enormous potential and thanks to this system, states can achieve significant savings in cooperation with health insurers.

The V4 countries often lack sufficient capacity, both institutional and personnel, to cover the full range of clinical classification issues and related international negotiations and projects. The collaboration and sharing of information and experience could bring multiplying effects in a form of shared and more comprehensive solutions.

The IHIS CR is aiming to intensify cooperation with the WHO in the field of the WHO Family of international Classifications. One of the possible steps is the establishment of the WHO Collaborating Center. This is a process that has been ongoing for at least two years, but the potential of this center could be a major asset for the V4 region.

One of the main missions of this Collaborating Center would be the implementation of ICD-11 and raising awareness of this and other clinical classification and terminology systems in the V4 region. It will be absolutely essential to establish firm contacts at the working level, as communication among the V4 states in this area is almost non-existent. The main goal of the Ministry of Health and the IHIS CR would therefore be to provide education activities to other V4 countries (e.g. through the formulation of curricula for coders, the sharing of state-of-the-art and best practices use of classifications in individual states).



V Health and environment

The Czech Republic, in cooperation with the WHO, organized the 6th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2017. The outcome of the conference is the "Ostrava Declaration", in which the Member States of the European Region of the WHO committed to developing and implementing so-called national portfolios, in which Member States themselves determine thematic areas and actions to improve the health and environmental situation in their territory. Given that the portfolio structure is not defined and given the limited management of the area by the WHO, the Ministries of Health and the Environment have decided to focus more on the exchange of experience between WHO Member States. This should involve convening a joint meeting of the participating V4 Ministries where they will present the individual portfolios and discuss a common V4 approach in the WHO field.

Event organized:

- Expert meeting – in cooperation with the Ministries of Health and the Environment – April 2020

V Health and environment

Up to 15% of deaths in the WHO European Region are caused by diseases associated to the environment. The 6th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Ostrava in June 2017, followed-up on the regular meetings of the member states of the European Region of the WHO at a high level of the European Environment and Health Process (EEHP) and the conference in Parma. The Ostrava Conference reviewed the efforts made by the Member States of the WHO European Region in relation to the environment and health and has defined the priorities in this area in the 21st century Europe, in line with new scientific knowledge and in connection with the Health 2020, the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

The Ostrava Declaration set out 7 priorities for the WHO European Region to focus on:

- 1) improving indoor and outdoor air quality;
- 2) access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene;
- 3) minimizing the adverse effects of chemicals on human health and the environment;
- 4) preventing and eliminating the adverse environmental and health effects, costs and inequalities related to waste management and contaminated sites;
- 5) enhancing resilience to climate change-related health risks and supporting measures to mitigate climate change in line with the Paris Agreement;
- 6) encouraging cities and regions to become healthier, safer and more sustainable;
- 7) building environmentally sustainable health systems and reducing their environmental impact.

In accordance with the Ostrava Declaration, states had to develop a national portfolio of actions focused on their individual priorities by the end of 2018, with the WHO assessing the progress of countries in meeting their targets.

However, the format of the portfolio is not defined and the WHO has not yet responded to the call for ensuring certain innovative practices:

- creating a portfolio template according to which the Member States will proceed,
- establishing a set of standardized tools to facilitate subsequent evaluation,
- launching an electronic platform to enable Member States to share useful information, coordinate themselves before meetings and communicate with the WHO.

In view of the above, the Health and Environmental Ministries have come to the conclusion that such sharing of information and comparison of portfolios and individual integrated thematic areas could initially take place in pilot form in a smaller format. The V4 seems to be ideal for this purpose. The outcomes and identified good practice, as well as problematic areas, could then be shared with the WHO.

During the expert meeting, experts from both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Environment would work together. An intersectoral approach to the issue would thus be declared, which could, for example, be extended to the Ministries of Transport, Industry and Trade.

VI The Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine

The subject of ethics is increasingly being discussed in the European region. Especially nowadays it is necessary for the V4 region to be more involved in this topic. The Czech Republic chaired the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2017. During its presidency, it co-organized a conference on the 20th anniversary of the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine in Strasbourg. During that period, we invited other Member States to review their contractual bases and, if necessary, to sign or ratify this international Convention, or its Additional Protocols. An expert conference on a broad platform, including the states outside the V4 region, in the so-called V4+ format, would provide a forum for dialogue and debate on the legal basis of the Council of Europe's contractual documents, but also on the ethical issues that these documents deal with.

Event organized:

- Expert conference in the format V4+ – with the participation of experts from Austria, Germany and other countries – March 2020

VI The Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and the Dignity of the Human Being with Regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine is a fundamental treaty of the Council of Europe regulating human rights in the context of advances in medical and biological sciences and the application of research to humans. The aim of the Convention is to guarantee everyone the inviolability of their rights and fundamental freedoms and to ensure their dignity and self-sufficiency without disrupting progress in science and research. At the same time, however, it expresses the need to use this progress solely for the benefit of man, both for present and future generations. In accordance with the implementation of the Convention, additional protocols may be concluded to develop its principles in other specific areas. To this end, the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe discussed and adopted four additional protocols:

- Additional Protocol on the Prohibition of Cloning of Human Beings
 - in force in all the V4 countries except Poland
- Additional Protocol concerning Transplantation of Organs and Tissues of Human Origin
 - of the V4 states in force only in Hungary
- Additional Protocol concerning Biomedical Research
 - in force in Slovakia and Hungary; the ratification process is underway in the Czech Republic
- Additional Protocol concerning Genetic Testing for Health Purposes
 - of the V4 countries signed currently only in the Czech Republic, where the ratification process is underway

The Czech Republic wishes to hold an expert conference with a wider participation outside the V4 region to instigate further debate on the Convention and its Additional Protocols. The purpose of the conference is not to create controversy, but rather to enable a professional debate, as ethical and technocratic views are valuable in this area.





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