



PACE

PATH TO EQUITY: EXPANDING ACCESS TO CANCER-PREVENTING
VACCINATION FOR ADULTS AND JUVENILES IN EUROPEAN
CARCERAL SETTINGS

PRESS RELEASE



UNIVERSITÀ
DI PISA



Sistema Socio Sanitario
Regione
Lombardia
ASST Santi Paolo e Carlo



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PRESS RELEASE

PACE Project launched to Strengthen Access to Cancer-Preventing Vaccination in European Prisons

29 January 2026 — A new three-year European initiative, **PACE –“Path to equity: expanding Access to cancer-preventing vaccination for adults and juveniles in European carceral settings”**, has officially launched under the **EU4Health Programme** (EU4H-PJG). Coordinated by the University of Pisa, PACE aims to reduce the burden of cancers caused by **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)** and **viral hepatitis (HBV, HCV)** through improved access to vaccination, screening, and linkage to care for adults and juveniles living in carceral settings.

People in prison face disproportionate health risks due to structural, cultural, and operational barriers. PACE aims to address these inequalities by implementing **evidence-based, locally adapted** interventions designed together with stakeholders using participatory and intersectional methodologies. The project will introduce pathfinder interventions in seven European countries, identifying and scaling best practices tailored to national prison systems.

Commenting on the public health inequalities faced by people in prison, Dr Fadi Meroueh, Head of the Health Unit at Villeneuve-les-Maguelone Prison (CHU Montpellier), noted: *“It is time to act: prevention and vaccination must break through prison walls. With PACE, we call on decision-makers to guarantee health equity for all, without exception.”*

During its implementation, PACE will develop the **Prison Implementation Compass**, a practical framework to support the replication of effective vaccination models and viral hepatitis screening in carceral settings across Europe. The project will also establish a **multi-country network of sentinel prisons** to strengthen monitoring, standardised data collection, and evaluation of intervention outcomes. In parallel, PACE will invest in **capacity building for prison staff, and healthcare workers**, ensuring that interventions remain sustainable beyond the project's duration.

As Professor Lara Tavoschi, at the University of Pisa, stressed: *“Prevention, including vaccination, and early detection can prevent cancers linked to infections — but public health interventions must be grounded in real settings. PACE will gather professional knowledge and lived experience from places of detention to promote change.”*

PACE contributes directly to the **EU Beating Cancer Plan** and the **WHO Hepatitis Elimination Goals**, supporting the European Union's commitment to improving cancer prevention and reducing health inequalities. Through policy dialogue, knowledge exchange and multi-sector collaboration, the project will work to ensure that its recommendations are integrated into national and European health strategies.

The PACE consortium brings together ten organisations from seven European countries, uniting a diverse network of universities, prison administrations, public health authorities and civil society experts. The project is coordinated by the University of Pisa (Italy), working alongside partners from Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Moldova, Portugal, and Romania. These include the Administratia Nationala A Penitenciarelor in both Moldova and Romania; the Azienda Socio-Sanitaria Territoriale (ASST) Santi Paolo e Carlo in Italy; the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Montpellier in France; the Cyprus National Addictions Authority and the Ministry of Justice and Public Order in Cyprus; the Faculdade de Farmácia da Universidade de Lisboa in Portugal; the Società Italiana Medicina delle Migrazioni (SIMM) in Italy; and the Prolepsis Institute in Greece.

Together, these partners combine complementary expertise in prison health, epidemiology, infectious diseases, public health policy, community engagement, and implementation science. Their collaboration ensures that PACE interventions are informed by multidisciplinary perspectives and reflect the realities of diverse prison systems across Europe.

For more information about the PACE project visit the website [**prisonhealth.eu**](https://prisonhealth.eu)

About EU4Health

EU4Health is the European Union's largest health programme to date, providing funding to initiatives that strengthen health systems, support disease prevention, and reduce health inequalities across Member States.