

PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT (IV)



INTERVIEW GUIDE
with **Dr. Daniela RAHOTĂ, Director Executiv Direcția de Sănătate Publică Județeană Bihor**

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Reporter: You are the executive director of the Bihor Public Health Directorate. I would like to ask you, for our readers, to tell us about the DSP's duties, the importance of the institution and the role it must play for the benefit of each of us...

Daniela RAHOTĂ: I am Dr. Daniela Rahotă, primary physician in public health and management, primary physician in hygiene, associate professor at the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, University of Oradea and executive director of the Bihor Public Health Directorate since 2012.

The Bihor Public Health Directorate, subordinate to the Ministry of Health and representing the public health authority at the county level, carries out national public health policies and programs, develops and implements local public health actions based on the principles of:

- health promotion
- health protection, by maintaining health and preventing diseases
- morbidity control by combating diseases and their consequences
- regaining health

Our mission is to monitor the health of the population, prevent diseases and support the implementation of national health policies.

Among the main tasks of the DSP are:

- monitoring and surveillance of the health of the population;
- coordination of activities for the prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases;
- promotion of health through educational campaigns and interventions;
- approval and control of hygienic and sanitary conditions in public and private units;
- coordination of vaccination activities;
- intervention in epidemiological or public health emergency situations.

- assessment of risk factors in the living and working environment;
- carrying out laboratory analyses (microbiology, chemicals, toxicology, radioactivity, etc.);
- sanitary regulation of economic and social objectives;
- collection and analysis of statistical data on the health status of the population.

DSP Bihor also actively collaborates with other local institutions and organizations to carry out joint actions in the field of public health and ensures that citizens are informed about legal procedures and regulations in the field. Essentially, the role of the Public Health Directorate is to oversee the proper functioning of the healthcare system, prevent illnesses and promptly respond to public health risks, thus contributing to a healthier, better informed community.

In general, public health refers exclusively to the organized and concerted efforts of society, supported by legislation, prevention and control programs, health, social, and educational institutions and services – with a view to reducing discomfort, disease, disability, invalidity, and premature death. Therefore, public health is a science of action, constantly evolving around its determining values. Through public health control, risk factors on the health status of a community or an individual are identified, evaluated and monitored simultaneously with proposals for measures and efficient communication. An important role of the Bihor DSP activity is also the evaluation and monitoring of the provision of preventive, curative and medical recovery care in the health units on the territory of the county, in order to ensure access to medical care or medical services to any person within the county and to ensure human and material resources.

- *What is the implementation status of the project entitled "SMART HEALTH: DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL CAPACITIES OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORATE Co-financed project from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania, within Component 7 - CALL CODE: MS - 732 related to I3.2 - NON-COMPETITIVE CALL, Pillar II: Digital Transformation, INVESTMENT: I3. Implementation of the eHealth and telemedicine system, PNRR/2022/C7/MS Specific investment I3.2 Digitalization of institutions with responsibilities in the health field subordinated to the Ministry of Health.*

DR: Through contract no. 1365-15-I3.2-11.04.2024 related to the project "Increasing the level of innovation and streamlining of the activity within the Public Health Directorate of Bihor County" with a total eligible budget from the PNRR of 2,481,850.00 lei excluding VAT, the achievement of two specific objectives was sought:

1. Improving, in parallel with the development of communication networks and IT/hardware infrastructure as well as,

2. Implementing an integrated computer software that ensures functionality in terms of traceability of activities within the services of the Public Health Directorate of Bihor, both in terms of internal flows and in terms of public services.

I can tell you that the Bihor Public Health Directorate is the first of the directorates to complete the implementation of the project on 29.11.2024. The activities included were:

1. Hardware equipment and IT facilities
2. Structured cabling system; IT infrastructure layout
3. Digitalization software
4. Consulting- project management
5. Communication and visibility

High-performance IT equipment allows for efficient management of the data that D.S.P. processes. Specifically, it was necessary to implement new components, update or expand existing hardware components and the IT communications network. To prepare the technical spaces, server rooms and spaces serving the central and distribution IT infrastructure were arranged. All these network hardware components are managed by appropriate software. Therefore, to improve/develop the communications networks and the IT/hardware infrastructure at the institution level, the following were purchased:

- 3 metal cabinets (constituting 3 local distribution hubs for network fragmentation, thus increasing cyber security and network redundancy)
 - 11 switches
 - 1 application server
 - 1 data storage (file server)
 - 6 UPS - uninterruptible power supply
 - 26 access points (2-level WiFi network: one secured for internal use and another for visitors)
 - 1 access point controller
 - 1 professional videoconferencing microphone
 - 1 professional videoconferencing camera
 - 1 integrated videoconferencing system
 - 1 A3 high-speed color copier
 - 92 All in One PCs with operating system included
 - 2 18-inch laptops with operating system included
 - 26 15-inch laptops with operating system included
 - Structured cabling system (cables, connectors, plastic cable channel, plugs, joints, patch cables, frames modulation) which allowed the transfer speed to be increased from 100 Mbps to 1000 Mbps
 - IT infrastructure setup - server room (Temperature sensor, humidity sensor, surveillance cameras, camera recording unit, access control system, dehumidifier, air conditioning system with online monitoring)

Regarding component 2 - Software, a solution was implemented that complies with good practices, national legal provisions and European regulations (regulations and directives) in the field of electronic identity, personal data protection and cybersecurity as well as the security of all interfaces of the information system. It has administration functionalities that allow the granting or revoking of access rights, access to information based on access credentials.

Furthermore, the conditions of scalability and potential for further development were met by implementing the following modules:

1. Electronic registry - registration and management of internal, incoming and outgoing documents within the institution,
2. Electronic archiving - allows scanning/attaching documents and subsequently archiving them electronically, in an operational electronic library,
3. Automatic publication mode regarding announcements on the institution's website (unlimited number of categories),
4. Online tele-audiences integrated into the website - allows the audience module to facilitate the conduct of online meetings/audiences, via videoconference to facilitate access for persons residing in other localities or countries,
5. Online document submission that allows applicants/economic agents to submit forms with pre-established headings in order to simplify the application submission process at the institution's headquarters,
6. Checking the status of submitted documents - allows individuals/legal entities to check in real time the status of their documents submitted both physically and online,
7. Generator of electronic connectors type: API that allows the generation of interconnection applications with other third-party IT systems,
8. Online notification module that allows individuals/legal entities to report problems quickly and efficiently to the institution,
9. Online notification map for civil servants and contractual personnel that allows viewing, filtering and management of requests on the interactive map in order to better organize teams in the territory,
10. Online notification map for citizens that allows citizens to view all incidents/problems reported by residents of a locality,
11. Personal data protection management that allows the configuration of the operating mode in such a way as to comply with the procedures regarding personal data security (GDPR),
12. Modification of the institution's website to provide the relevant data and statistics available, legislative news but above all to be adaptable for any type of device.
13. Smart locker - DocuBox that allows the functionality of depositing and picking up documents of public interest 24/7 through a smart locker equipped with software and an easy interface, thus increasing the satisfaction of citizens who will no longer depend on the schedule at the counter.

R: *How is DSP involved in support activities for people who request information or guidance in areas related to the specifics of the institution's activity?*

DR: By implementing this project, the institution is closer to people who either request information or need guidance. I was saying at the beginning of the interview that part of our activity consists of identifying and managing risk factors for health. But there is a need to communicate



this risk. This has become a priority of our activity through information-education campaigns targeting various population groups from children to the elderly, providing clear, precise information related to health, including disease prevention, vaccination, hygiene, nutrition and mental health. Thus, through the health promotion department, 6842 information-education-communication activities/actions were carried out in 2024, aiming to disseminate information and specific messages to target groups. Over 120 partnerships and over 500 collaborations with institutions, non-governmental organizations, economic units, and health units were concluded.

https://www.dspbihor.gov.ro/2025/02/Informatii%20publice/Raport_de_activitate_DSP_Bihor_2024.pdf

In addition to national information-education campaigns on the importance of vaccination, prevention of tobacco and alcohol consumption, reproductive health, disease prevention, etc. DSP Bihor also ran local campaigns aimed at specific public health priorities:

1. Prevenirea îmbolnăvirilor specifice de sezon rece și sezon cald
2. For beautiful children, healthy teeth - Promoting oral health among second-grade students in Bihor County
3. Healthy lifestyle in adolescents (grades 9 and 10) and other age groups
4. Training students and other categories of personnel for activities to disseminate messages with medical content
5. Reducing the phenomenon of stillbirths and infant mortality in Bihor County
6. Adopting healthy behavior in terms of nutrition and physical activity among children and adolescents and the elderly population
7. Optimizing health education among the vulnerable population through information - education - communication activities - in order to change unhealthy behaviors and adopt a healthy lifestyle

The Directorate of Public Health Bihor is permanently open to citizens, and through its departments, it offers informative support, counseling and guidance in all areas related to public health and regarding compliance with regulatory norms.

Individuals or legal entities can obtain clear answers in accordance with the legislation in force, either through written requests, requests sent electronically, or through hearings or direct contact with the institution's specialists. We also periodically offer updates and informative materials on the institution's website, in the local press and through social networks.

- What projects do you have on Health Promotion in Schools?

DR: As we have detailed in the information campaigns, educating children and young people to adopt healthy behavior is an important objective in our activity because we can contribute to the development of long-term healthy habits.

Through the Health Evaluation and Promotion Department, the Bihor Public Health Directorate constantly carries out activities aimed at children and adolescents, in

collaboration with the Bihor County School Inspectorate and teachers from educational institutions.

Information – Education – Communication (IEC) activities are integrated into the thematic National Campaigns dedicated to World or European Health Days, according to the calendar established by the National Institute of Public Health and approved by the Ministry of Health.

The themes addressed target mental health (with an emphasis on preventing bullying, technology addiction and violence), preventing alcohol, tobacco and drug consumption, promoting healthy eating, physical activity, as well as supporting harmonious development among students.

In addition to national campaigns, DSP Bihor also carries out local interventions adapted to the needs of the community, such as:

- "Healthy Lifestyle" - health education activities in schools;
- "For beautiful children, healthy teeth" - promoting oral health among second-grade students;
- "Healthy nutrition and physical activity" (VIAȚA project) - intended for preschoolers and students in grades 0–4 - for the formation of healthy behaviors from the earliest possible age.

At the same time, we are partners of other institutions and/or organizations with whom we carry out joint activities within projects on agreed priority topics.

The goal of these projects is to improve the health of children and adolescents through education for prevention, the formation of healthy behaviors and the reduction of exposure to risk factors from an early age.

R: *What are, in general, the projects you propose in the short, medium and long term, as a director?*

- What challenges does it involve/assume, from the point of view of organizing, planning, coordinating, leading and controlling the activity?

DR: Of course, by the position of executive director of DSP Bihor I mean the organization, planning, management and control of the entire activity of the department. These are actually the managerial functions. Since 2017, I have not had a deputy director of public health and I had to take over the duties, currently having only a deputy economic executive director, Dr. ec. Florin Mureșan. Through planning, I had a plan by optimizing human resources in each department to ensure unity, continuity and especially flexibility in action, depending on the challenges that arose. By clearly defining the responsibilities provided in the job descriptions and through individual training for the optimal fulfillment of tasks, I was concerned with ensuring a human resource capable of making decisions based on competence, efficiency and especially responsibility. Activity control is a continuous process that is actually a permanent improvement in quality aimed at increasing performance.

Of course, I have set projects that I have already completed, but, depending on legislative or conjunctural changes, new ones have appeared. Therefore,

In the short term, I will continue with:

1. Annual assessment of the health status of the population based on demographic indicators, birth rate, morbidity, mortality, etc.
2. Based on this study, I will continue the annual launch of information-communication-education campaigns on topics identified as possible risk factors for the health of the population, while improving the health service infrastructure in the county. Continuing to organize workshops in collaboration with the Family Physicians' Association, which has been an active and loyal partner in communicable and non-communicable disease prevention programs for many years. Strengthening partnerships with international and national organizations: UNICEF, the Red Cross, etc. is a continuous concern aimed at supporting the disadvantaged population in accessing health services.

The short-term objectives also focus on strengthening the institutional capacity of DSP Bihor, modernizing the digital infrastructure, increasing the efficiency of the services offered, and rapidly adapting to current public health challenges.

In the medium term:

The digitalization of the health system is one of the ambitious projects of DSP Bihor by developing an IT solution for precise management of statistical data as well as efficient communication between health institutions in the county. I can say that we have already started to develop software that will ensure the collection of data from family doctors, without telephone communication.

Creating partnerships with non-governmental or governmental organizations to implement screening programs for chronic diseases, family planning or reproductive health are projects that need to be addressed in order to promote health education.

Long-term:

Establishing and implementing strategic and sustainable health policies together with local public authorities. The Bihor Public Health Directorate has an essential role in the technical and methodological coordination of the activity of community healthcare personnel. Community healthcare is a fundamental component of the public health system, which aims to ensure access to basic medical services for all people, especially for vulnerable people, located in disadvantaged, isolated areas or with limited access to classic medical services, or belonging to groups at risk of social exclusion.

These professionals carry out preventive activities, ensure early identification of health problems, guidance to specialized medical services and, perhaps most importantly, strengthen access and increase the population's trust in the health system, they do not just provide medical services – they provide trust. They are the first to see a problem, sometimes before the family is aware of it. They are the ones who listen, explain, align misunderstandings and, often, bring hope.

The implementation of the project "Providing integrated services in rural communities - facilitating access of vulnerable people to efficient and quality basic services",

code SMIS 339395, represents in this sense a major step towards supporting rural communities and vulnerable categories in our county. By selecting the 2,000 administrative-territorial units in the rural area, at the national level, the project aims to strengthen the local capacity to respond to the complex needs of the population. Through this project, an integrated community team will be formed in each included commune: community health nurse, social worker and school counselor - a group of specialists who will collaborate directly to respond, in a coordinated and efficient manner, to the complex needs of vulnerable people in the community.

In Bihor County, where many municipalities face a lack of resources and serious social and medical challenges, such an integrated program is absolutely essential.

In the long term, the project has the potential to fundamentally transform the way rural communities access essential services. The degree of social exclusion will be significantly reduced and functional local support networks will be created. DSP Bihor will continue to monitor, support and guide the work of medical staff in the integrated community teams, ensuring the quality and efficiency of interventions. It is an approach that I support with all my conviction.

On the other hand, promoting research to develop an innovative solution to address future public health problems in the context of climate change, population aging or other challenges due to emerging or re-emerging pathogens are long-term projects.

Another long-term project is the permanent modernization of the public health diagnostic and investigation laboratory and the radiation hygiene laboratory by accessing structural funds in order to maintain the RENAR and CNCAN accreditations, taking into account the increase in the services offered but also their quality by performing quality analyses that led to the achievement of annual own revenues of 600,000 euros.

R: *What are the main problems facing the DSP director?*

- How has the approach to a new epidemic changed/if it has changed, following COVID-19 and if so, are you prepared to deal with a new epidemiological threat?

DR: It is a general question because problems are daily. It is important to prioritize these problems. As director of DSP Bihor, I have 4 types of resources: human, material, financial and time. Before 2020, we were faced with a lack of specialized personnel and insufficient budgets to face the challenge of the COVID-19 health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic period represented an extreme stress test for the entire health system, and for DSPs, in particular, it highlighted how essential the capacity for rapid response, inter-institutional coordination, teamwork and effective communication are.

Humanity has gone through several infectious-contagious diseases over the years that caused pandemics, some with disastrous consequences starting with the Antonine plague, the bubonic plague continuing with the Spanish flu, the swine flu, SARS, EBOLA. After each of the pandemics, it was necessary to project and implement public health systems that proved to be vulnerable, requiring



continuous improvement and development to function properly. From history, we have learned that a failure in the functioning of the health system would have disastrous consequences and would allow the uncontrolled evolution of epidemics/pandemics with significant losses of human lives. I believe that improved medical care year after year, knowledge of the factors that determine pandemics along with the application of hygiene and sanitation measures are beneficial for mitigating their impact and therefore, maintaining an efficient public health system is a useful investment for the future.

A public health system that is intended to be implemented must be periodically improved and adapted to current needs. It is necessary to be periodically evaluated based on indicators and measurements that are based on communication between government decision-makers and health care providers together with patients. Community involvement in the identification and management of emergency situations could lead to an increase in the quality of health care.

In general, health systems that include people, institutions and resources must be accessible, effective, evolutionary so as to always adapt to future challenges and an ever-changing environment, permanently modernized.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that threats to public health do not respect borders and that a global, coordinated and rapid response is needed to address any challenge. On 13.03.2020, the first positive COVID-19 case was confirmed in Bihor County. Bihor County, being a border county in western Romania, faced a significantly higher infection rate based mainly on cross-border migration. Despite all the measures imposed by the authorities to close the borders located within the county, this only caused a delay in the spread of the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.

A study conducted by us between March 2020 and March 2022 confirmed a total of 80,080 COVID-19 patients, 2,936 deaths, or 3.66%, and 523 outbreaks. As I mentioned, it was a test of teamwork because we ensured, through our own human resources, material and financial resources from the Ministry of Health: epidemiological triage in 4 land border crossing points, 1 air, 1 railway, in addition to accommodation activities in 11 hotel/guesthouse type locations for isolation/quarantine of no less than 2863 people who were provided with meals and medical consultation. For all the activities carried out by the employees of the Bihor DSP, activities that were completely different from those included in the job descriptions and for which they had professional training, adaptability, flexibility, empathy and especially personal sacrifice were required; which is why I conveyed to them whenever I had the opportunity, my thanks and admiration. To respond to the challenges of the pandemic, a series of instruments and means were quickly established, non-existent at the time of the global state of emergency, requiring in particular a series of normative and legislative acts that we urgently applied.

Are you asking me if, 5 years after declaring a state of emergency, we are prepared to face a new epidemiological threat? I think I will answer with what I have learned after this challenge.

We have therefore learned that the development of institutional capacity at the local level with the development of

mechanisms for assessing biological risk and rapid response to epidemics and pandemics as well as the development of therapeutic methods and products, along with an accurate information and computer system for collecting and validating data with a focus on raising awareness of the importance of vaccination among the population, through correct information on the methods of prevention through vaccination and through the use of tools and methods adapted to technological development, can lead to real monitoring and improvement of the health status of the population. And especially, effective communication to the population carried out only by specialists in the field can ensure an adequate response to the measures established.

R: If you feel it is necessary to answer another question that was not asked, now is the time

DR: As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview regarding the purpose of public health, an important role belongs to the community because public health represents the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes of the population oriented towards maintaining and improving health. In 1998, the WHO classified the determinants of health into four groups: macroeconomic, environmental, socio-economic, educational factors. In turn, each group includes direct and indirect determinants. Among the direct determinants of major importance are: lifestyle (smoking, type of diet, alcohol, drug use), physical and social environmental conditions (access to drinking water, sanitation, habitat), social group behaviors (violence in the family environment, access to health services). Indirect determinants include: gross domestic product, poverty, pollution, climate change, migration, socio-demographic changes in the population structure, crisis situations (natural disasters, armed conflicts, etc.). I wanted to remind you of the determinants of health to highlight the fact that each individual can act to maintain their own physical and mental health, prevent diseases or prolong their life.

"Health is a treasure that few know how to value, although almost everyone is born with it" - Hippocrates

*Recorded by: Dr. Sorana Lixandru
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