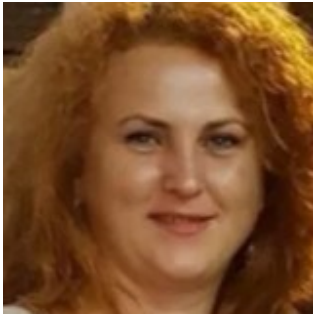


PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT (VII)

**Interview with Mihaela VLADA****Director of the Vaslui Public Health Directorate**

Professional Experience:
2003 – Advisor, Public Health Authority (A.S.P.) Vaslui
2006 – Head of the Health Programs Department, Public Health Directorate (D.S.P.)

Vaslui

2010 – Present - Executive Director, Public Health Directorate (D.S.P.) Vaslui

Reporter: *You are the executive director of the Vaslui Public Health Directorate. I would like you, for our readers, to tell us about the responsibilities of the Public Health Directorate (DSP), the importance of the institution, and the role it should play for the benefit of each of us...*

Mihaela VLADA: According to the legislation in force, the County Public Health Directorates and the Public Health Directorate of Bucharest Municipality are deconcentrated public services with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Health, representing the public health authority at county level. They implement national public health policies and programs, develop and carry out local public health actions, authorize health structures, issue compliance decisions for the authorization of pharmaceutical units or non-compliance decisions, carry out public health inspections, organize statistical records on health issues, as well as plan and implement investments financed from the state budget for the health sector, as well as from reimbursable and non-reimbursable external funds, sponsorships, and donations.

Public Health Directorates (DSP) are essential institutions for the functioning of Romania's healthcare system, playing a major role in protecting and promoting the population's health. Their importance can be understood through several key functions:

1. **Disease prevention** The DSPs organize vaccination campaigns, screening programs, and health education activities. Through prevention, medical costs and population suffering are reduced.
2. **Epidemiological surveillance** They monitor the spread of communicable diseases (as was the case with COVID-19) and take rapid measures to limit outbreaks.
3. **Hygiene and environmental control** The DSP inspects sanitary conditions in schools, healthcare units – medical offices, medical analysis laboratories, hospitals, as well as the living and working environment in various fields of activity, contributing to disease prevention.
4. **Emergency response** In cases of epidemics, natural disasters, or other health crises, the DSP coordinates

the local response and collaborates with other authorities.

5. **Implementation of public health policies** These institutions implement the Ministry of Health's strategies at local level and adapt measures to the needs of the community.
6. **Population information** The DSP provides official information and health recommendations, contributing to combating misinformation.

In short, DSPs are the "first line" in maintaining public health, because they focus not only on treating diseases, but especially on preventing them and protecting the entire community.

Public Health Directorates (DSP) are, in short, the institutions that ensure people do not get sick, not just that they are treated once they are already ill.

Roles and main importance of County Public Health Directorates:

In the field of epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases: they monitor communicable diseases, manage emergency situations, and coordinate interventions in case of epidemics or other public health threats.

In the field of national health programs: they ensure the implementation of national health programs (vaccination, screening, prevention programs) at local level.

In the field of public health control: they verify compliance with hygiene standards in hospitals, schools, food establishments, and other public spaces in order to prevent health risks.

In the field of environmental quality factors: they monitor the quality of drinking water and the living environment.

In the field of authorization: they approve requests regarding the establishment or closure of public or private healthcare units, their organizational structure, reorganization, relocation, and name changes.

In the field of rapid intervention: they participate in coordinating first qualified aid in collaboration with emergency inspectorates.

In the field of information: they carry out health promotion and health education activities

Benefits provided to the population in the assigned area:

- limiting the spread of communicable diseases;
- long-term prevention;
- ensuring compliance with hygiene standards;

- ensuring the quality of the living and working environment, the quality of food and food-contact materials, and the quality of drinking water.

County Public Health Directorates and the Public Health Directorate of Bucharest Municipality are institutions with a fundamental role in managing population health at local level, with key responsibilities in epidemiological surveillance, implementation of national health programs, and control of hygiene standards, as well as organizing medical assistance in emergency situations, disasters, or catastrophes, coordinating healthcare resources to protect the community.

In simple terms:

It helps you avoid getting sick – it organizes vaccinations and information campaigns (for example, during the COVID-19 period, it informed people about the rules they needed to follow).

- It monitors diseases – if a dangerous disease appears, it tracks where it spreads and tries to stop it.
- It checks cleanliness and hygiene – it inspects hospitals, medical offices, and schools to ensure safe conditions.
- It intervenes in serious situations – if an epidemic or major health problem occurs, it coordinates the measures.
- It informs you correctly – it provides advice and guidelines so you know how to protect yourself.

The Public Health Directorate (DSP) is the institution that works “behind the scenes” to keep you and others safe and healthy every day, not only when you reach a doctor.

The role of the Public Health Directorate for each of us, in very concrete terms, is to make our lives safer and healthier, even if we are not aware of it on a daily basis.

In addition, the DSP works to ensure that you have a lower risk of illness, live in a safer environment, and know how to take care of your health.

R: What is the implementation stage of the project entitled “SMART HEALTH: DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL CAPABILITIES OF THE VASLUI COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORATE”?

MV: The Vaslui County Public Health Directorate is the beneficiary of significant funding for the implementation of the “Development of Digital Capabilities” project. This initiative is financed through Romania’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), with an implementation period between 15 April 2024 and 30 April 2026. The total updated budget is 2,989,747.62 RON, of which the non-reimbursable funding provided through the PNRR amounts to 2,471,874.15 RON. The main objective of the project is the full digitalization of the institution, covering both hardware and software components, as well as human competencies.

From a technical perspective, the intervention is being carried out under PNRR Investment I3.2, dedicated to the digitalization of institutions with responsibilities in the health sector. The project focuses on two main components: the first aims at improving and developing communication networks and the overall hardware infra-

structure across the institution. The second involves the implementation of modern non-clinical software solutions and ensuring data interoperability.

To summarize the impact of the project, we can compare the “before” and “after” situations. We have moved away from an outdated, vulnerable IT infrastructure and a paper-based bureaucratic system. Currently, we operate on a modern, secure infrastructure, carry out 100% digital processes, benefit from operational efficiency, and ensure data security. The direct effect is the delivery of significantly improved services for citizens.

We are also opening the institution to its end beneficiaries: citizens and the business environment. The Front Office pillar provides electronic services using modern authentication through ROeID. Beneficiaries have access to smart online forms, can communicate with us via a secure messaging system, and benefit from a private portal where they can consult the history of their requests and issued documents. At the same time, the system is designed to be interoperable with key national databases such as those of ANAF or ONRC.

The final result of this ecosystem translates into a real and positive impact. For citizens, it means access to public services 24/7, predictability, and transparency in the handling of requests. For the Vaslui County Public Health Directorate, it means synergistic functioning, data-driven decision-making, and significantly increased institutional resilience.

R: How does the DSP get involved in support activities for people requesting information or guidance in areas related to the institution’s activity? - What projects do you have in Health Promotion?

MV: County Public Health Directorates are institutions with a fundamental role in managing population health at local level, with key responsibilities in epidemiological surveillance, implementation of national health programs, control of hygiene standards, and organization of medical assistance in emergency situations, disasters, or catastrophes, coordinating healthcare resources to protect the community.

Public Health Directorates act as a technical and procedural support point to ensure compliance with public health regulations and to provide accurate information to citizens.

DSPJ Vaslui projects in Health Promotion:

The Vaslui County Public Health Directorate plays an essential role in promoting population health. The Health Status Evaluation and Health Promotion Unit carries out activities within the National Health Program “Health Promotion – development of health education programs and a healthy lifestyle,” according to established indicators, namely information, education, and communication activities in line with the local action plan, as well as the implementation of national campaigns included in the national campaign plan.

Health promotion activities are aimed at the general population as well as vulnerable groups. Regarding the involvement of DSPJ Vaslui in supporting individuals requesting information or guidance, the institution

plays an essential role as an intermediary between the population and the healthcare system. DSPJ Vaslui continuously provides updated information on disease prevention, protective measures, vaccination, and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. Citizens can receive counseling either directly at the institution's headquarters, by phone, or online, and are directed to appropriate medical services, screening programs, or other competent institutions, depending on the issue raised.

In addition, DSPJ Vaslui carries out health education activities within the community, collaborating with educational institutions, local authorities, family doctors, school medical assistants, community health workers, and non-governmental organizations to ensure accurate information. In special situations, such as the emergence of epidemics or public health risks, the institution provides clear and prompt guidance on preventive behaviors and necessary measures to limit the spread of disease.

Health promotion activities are implemented through a series of projects and campaigns addressed to the general population or specific target groups. These include vaccination campaigns aimed at increasing vaccination coverage and combating misinformation, as well as campaigns for the prevention of communicable and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, or obesity.

An important initiative is the local campaign "Say NO to addictions!", which includes information sessions aimed at increasing awareness among adolescents and their parents regarding the health risks of tobacco use (conventional smoking, smokeless tobacco, and heated tobacco products), alcohol, and drugs in all forms; increasing awareness of passive exposure to smoke or other harmful compounds; and strengthening adolescents' motivation to avoid any form of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use.

At the same time, DSP Vaslui organizes screening and information programs in educational units, medico-social centers, maternal centers, school clinics, and primary care offices for early detection of cancer, especially cervical cancer, through correct information regarding HPV (Human Papillomavirus) vaccination. Vaccination is the most effective method of prevention. It also runs campaigns to promote a healthy lifestyle through the adoption of beneficial health behaviors.

Local and national campaigns carried out by the Health Status Evaluation and Health Promotion Unit include: promotion of healthy eating and physical activity, promotion of mental health, promotion of vaccination, prevention of alcohol and tobacco consumption, promotion of reproductive health, the impact of environmental factors on health, and marking world/European/national health days dedicated to various health issues, all aimed at increasing public awareness and responsibility.

The integration of digitalization into health promotion activities represents an essential step toward increasing the efficiency and accessibility of DSPJ Vaslui interventions. In this context, the use of digital tools enables the rapid and tailored transmission of information to the population, as well as improved interaction with beneficiaries.

Thus, health promotion is increasingly carried out through online platforms, official websites, and social media channels, where educational materials, guides, video cam-

paigns, and updated information on disease prevention and healthy lifestyles are published. These channels facilitate quick access to information for a large number of people, including groups that are difficult to reach through traditional methods.

Moreover, digitalization enables the development of applications and interactive tools for health education, self-assessment of health status, or monitoring of certain risk factors. Health promotion campaigns can also be conducted through webinars, online sessions, or e-learning platforms, contributing to higher participation and a more efficient educational process.

Digitalization in health promotion contributes to the modernization of public health services, facilitating communication, education, and active public engagement, as well as data-driven decision-making based on real-time and updated information.

R: *What are, in general terms, the projects you aim to implement in the short, medium, and long term as director?*

MV: In order to achieve sustainability and the strategic development of the institution, the long-term projects to be implemented are:

- **Project: Implementation of multiannual budget planning**
Aligning financial resources with the institution's strategic objectives.
- **Project: Integrated financial management system**
Developing a unified, interoperable framework that integrates all economic processes.
- **Project: Development of a performance-oriented organizational culture**
Introducing a system of performance indicators and staff accountability.

The implementation of these projects involves the following challenges, related to management functions:

- **Organization:** Adapting the organizational structure to digitalized processes, clarifying responsibilities, and reducing overlaps in duties.
- **Planning:** Managing limited financial resources under conditions of budget unpredictability and setting realistic priorities.
- **Coordination:** Ensuring effective collaboration between departments and aligning economic activities with operational ones.
- **Leadership:** Motivating staff, managing resistance to change, and promoting a participatory and results-oriented leadership style.
- **Control:** Implementing efficient monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms based on relevant performance indicators.

CONCLUSION:

The proposed projects aim to capitalize on already implemented investments, increase the efficiency of economic activity, and consolidate a modern, transparent, and sustainable financial management system adapted to the requirements of the public health system.

In the field of human resources:

- analyzing and forecasting staffing needs in line with the general and specific objectives of the institution;
- ensuring staff recruitment in compliance with the applicable legal framework, so that the institution has human resources with the optimal experience, knowledge, and skills required to achieve the organization's strategic plans;
- developing and strengthening staff skills through opportunities for continuous personal development;
- improving professional performance and continuous training in order to support the individual professional development of employees;
- creating a climate of cooperation and mutual trust, maintaining productive and efficient relationships between management and employees;
- promoting teamwork and flexibility-based practices;
- developing a non-financial reward system for staff efforts, demonstrated competencies, and achieved performance, as well as for involvement in new projects that are not necessarily remunerated;
- adopting an ethical management approach based on fairness, transparency, motivation, and respect for equal opportunity principles;
- implementing performance management, in the sense of supporting employees in achieving results consistently aligned with institutional objectives;
- reducing “pantouflage” (revolving door phenomenon);
- transforming the mindset of civil servants to become solution- and service-oriented;
- ensuring the efficiency of local public services by maintaining a high level of competence and professional training among staff, with an emphasis on digitalization, performance, and continuous training;
- creating a flexible workforce capable of quickly adapting to crises and frequent legislative changes.

In the field of ethics and integrity:

continuing the strengthening of institutional integrity by increasing the level of implementation of anti-corruption measures within DSPJ Vaslui;

In the field of institutional digitalization:

finalizing the implementation and use of the ConectX digital ecosystem, within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, in order to simplify intra- and inter-institutional communication processes and reduce bureaucracy;

In the field of public health service delivery:

- actively monitoring the health status of the population at county level through specialized departments within the organizational structure, in order to identify the main public health issues and prioritize the allocation of available resources for interventions with the highest efficiency in improving population health;

- increasing the number of beneficiaries of national health programs by promoting them in the media and carrying out specific activities through the community healthcare network;
- ensuring the implementation of all vaccination campaigns within the National Vaccination Program (NIP), in accordance with the vaccination schedule and the recommendations of the Ministry of Health;
- ensuring the supervision and enforcement of legislation by institutions and bodies responsible for public health, as well as by private healthcare units, and collaborating for this purpose with local medical-professional organizations, local public authorities, and other competent entities.

R: What challenges does this involve in terms of organization, planning, coordination, leadership, and control of activity?

MV: The director of a Public Health Directorate (DSP) has a role focused largely on coordination and “firefighting” in public health. The main challenges are quite clear and very concrete:

1. Sudden emergency situations:

Epidemics, outbreaks in schools or hospitals, water or food contamination. The director must respond quickly, sometimes without having all the complete data.

2. Lack of resources:

- insufficient staff
- limited budget
- sometimes inadequate equipment These factors make it difficult to fully control situations across the territory.

3. Disease control and prevention:

There is a constant need to monitor infectious diseases and prevent their spread. The challenge is that diseases are not easily controlled and new situations constantly arise.

4. Misinformation among the population:

False information can lead to vaccine refusal or non-compliance with public health rules, making disease control more difficult.

5. Balancing restrictions and normal life:

There is a need to protect public health without completely disrupting society or the economy. These decisions are often difficult to justify to everyone.

In short:

The main challenge for a DSP director is to protect public health in unpredictable situations, with limited resources.

R: How has the approach to a new epidemic changed following COVID-19, and are you prepared to face a new epidemiological threat?

MV: The coordination of all actions during an epidemic/pandemic must be carried out by specialists in preventive medicine. →

Individual and collective protective measures, as well as hygiene rules, must be strictly followed so that all activities (educational, industrial, commercial, etc.) can continue to function.

Public communication must be carried out through clear and accurate messages delivered by specialists in the field, in order to prevent misinformation and fake news. Regarding institutional preparedness for a new epidemiological threat, it must be emphasized that no epidemiologi-

cal threat is identical to another; each has its own particularities. We can respond to an epidemiological threat, but it depends on its scale. The preventive medicine network must be strengthened with well-trained human resources, advanced laboratory equipment, and adequate material resources.

Recorded by: Sorana Lixandru, MD
Interview with Mihaela VLADA
Director of the Vaslui Public Health Directorate