

PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT (XI)



Interview with CIOCHINĂ GABRIEL-VASILE-ȘTEFAN, Executive Director of the Brăila Public Health Directorate

Professional experience: Dentist, practicing in a private clinic for approximately 20 years, up to 2017.

Since February 2011: Executive Director of the Brăila Public Health Directorate (current position).

Reporter: *You are the Executive Director of the Brăila Public Health Directorate (DSP). For the benefit of our readers, could you please tell us about the DSP's responsibilities, the importance of the institution, and the role it plays for each of us?*

CIOCHINĂ GABRIEL-VASILE-ȘTEFAN: As outlined in Order No. 6161/2024 (as amended) regarding the approval of the organization and functioning regulations for county and Bucharest municipality public health directorates, DSPs are decentralized public services with legal personality. Subordinate to the Ministry of Health, they act as the public health authority at the county level. They implement national public health policies and programs; develop and carry out local public health initiatives; authorize healthcare facilities; issue compliance decisions for the authorization of pharmaceutical units (or non-compliance decisions); conduct public health inspections; maintain statistical records on health issues; and plan and manage investments in the health sector funded by the state budget, as well as by repayable and non-repayable external funds, sponsorships, and donations.

When considering the importance of this institution and the role it must play for the benefit of us all, we must first highlight the protection of public health through health status monitoring and disease prevention—specifically the prevention and control of communicable diseases.

National health programs are also of particular importance; their implementation translates into vaccination, screening, and health education campaigns, among other equally vital initiatives.

Another key role of the Public Health Directorate (DSP) is monitoring environmental and workplace risk factors—including drinking water quality, air quality, and hygiene conditions—as well as enforcing hygiene and public health standards in healthcare facilities, educational institutions, food service establishments, and beauty salons; in short, in any facility with a potential impact on health.

Through our Health Promotion unit, we conduct information and prevention campaigns aimed at the general public. Finally, yet crucially, we are responsible for col-

lecting and analyzing health-related statistical data, which is essential for better planning of medical service needs at the county level.

- What is the implementation status of the project titled "SMART HEALTH: DEVELOPING THE DIGITAL CAPABILITIES OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORATE"—a project co-financed by Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) under 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; NRRP/2022/C7/MS; Specific Investment I3.2: Digitalization of health-related institutions under the authority of the Ministry of Health)?

CGVȘ: The Brăila Public Health Directorate, acting as the beneficiary, has completed the implementation of the "Digitalization – Brăila Public Health Directorate" project. This project was funded under financing contract no. 1377/71/I3.2/12.04.2024, utilizing funds allocated through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)—specifically Component C7 (Digital Transformation), Investment I3 (Implementation of the eHealth and telemedicine system), and Investment I3.2 (Digitalization of health institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Health)—and was managed by the Ministry of Health in its capacity as the reform and investment coordinator.

The project was successfully implemented; the investments addressed the needs identified at the Brăila Public Health Directorate and met the proposed project indicators, thereby achieving the NRRP objectives stipulated in the contract. The project commenced on April 23, 2024, and was completed on May 31, 2026.

Furthermore, the project contributed to creating a safe and healthy professional environment that adheres to modern environmental standards, thereby supporting future professional development.

The total value of financing contract no. 1377/71/I3.2/12.04.2024 is 1,949,481.51 RON; of this amount, the eligible NRRP value is 1,636,441.33 RON, and the associated eligible VAT covered by the NRRP is 313,040.18 RON.

R: *How does DSP Brăila provide support to individuals seeking information or guidance on matters falling within the institution's scope of activity?*

CGVȘ: DSP Brăila supports citizens by providing information and guidance on public health matters—both at the institution's premises whenever possible and during weekly public consultation sessions, via telephone, or by email—with the institution's website serving as a key source of information.

The inquiries cover the full spectrum of the institution's activities, with the majority relating to disease prevention, vaccination, hygiene standards, the authorization and certification of activities, and other public health issues.

Collaboration with local authorities, healthcare

facilities, and educational institutions is also crucial, particularly regarding the promotion of healthy lifestyles and disease prevention.

- What projects do you have regarding health promotion?

In accordance with the methodology for designing and monitoring national information, education, and communication campaigns—with themes established based on public health priorities—the Health Status Assessment and Health Promotion Unit is conducting six such campaigns in 2026, with the approval of the Ministry of Health: Mental Health Promotion; Vaccination Promotion; Alcohol Consumption Prevention; Tobacco Consumption Prevention; Promotion of Healthy Eating and Physical Activity; and Reproductive Health Promotion.

R: Broadly speaking, what projects do you envision for the short, medium, and long term in your role as Director of the Brăila Public Health Directorate (DSP)?

CGVŞ: That is an excellent question, especially given the current challenges.

In the short term, I intend to conduct a comprehensive analysis of DSP Brăila's operations to identify current strengths and vulnerabilities. At the same time, I aim to improve communication with healthcare facilities, local public authorities, and the general public through transparent and prompt information sharing, while also strengthening epidemiological surveillance activities and our capacity to respond to public health emergencies.

In the medium term, I will focus on continuing the digitalization of administrative processes and developing electronic services to streamline DSP Brăila's operations. Building on existing efforts, I will develop county-level prevention and health education programs—focusing on vaccination, chronic disease prevention, healthy lifestyles, and mental health—with the active involvement of the community care network, which is currently undergoing significant expansion across all local administrative units.

In the long term, I envision the Brăila Public Health Directorate transforming into a modern, digitized, and citizen-oriented institution grounded in performance and transparency. I aim to ensure a high level of preparedness for crisis management and to strengthen the resilience of the county's public health system.

All of this will be achievable by fostering an organizational culture based on professionalism, integrity, collaboration, and continuous development.

- What challenges does it entail—in terms of organizing, planning, coordinating, leading, and controlling the activity?

CGVŞ: Challenges? The main challenge is the resistance to change among some of the staff.

R: What are the main challenges facing the Director of the Public Health Directorate (DSP)?

CGVŞ: Among the main challenges I face, I would highlight the shortage of specialized medical staff, the

lack of a deputy executive director for public health and a chief inspector, as well as underfunding relative to actual, objective needs.

- How has the approach to a new epidemic changed following COVID-19, and—should the need arise—are you prepared to handle a new epidemiological threat?

CGVŞ: It is certain that the approach to a new epidemic has changed after going through the COVID-19 period. We now have at our disposal both updated legal provisions and procedures and software programs developed by specialists at the Ministry of Health and the National Institute of Public Health. I would like to emphasize that the team assembled in Brăila County—comprising all local and county institutions and structures, such as the Prefect's Office, the "Dunărea" Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, the Police Inspectorate, the Gendarmerie Inspectorate, the County Council, and healthcare facilities (to name but a few)—demonstrated total commitment during the COVID-19 period. I am confident that, in the event of a new epidemiological threat, the response would be immediate and equally firm.

R: If you feel it is necessary to answer another question that hasn't been asked, now is the time.

CGVŞ: What does it mean to have spent 15 years in the leadership role of Executive Director of the Public Health Directorate? It means a great deal. It encompasses everything from professional fulfillment to burnout, and from personal growth to personal sacrifices; yet, the most important aspect is the honor of serving the citizens of Brăila County and contributing to all matters concerning public health.

Recorded by: Sorana Lixandru, MD

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