



Lausanne panorama

Canton of Vaud, Switzerland

General overview

One of Switzerland's 26 cantons, Vaud is the largest and most populated French-speaking one. Covering an area of 3212 km², with a population of 830 791 (1), it is divided into ten districts and has 300 municipalities (2). Its capital is Lausanne. Bordering Lake Geneva to the west and the Alps to the east, the canton of Vaud is located between France and the German-speaking part of Switzerland, which makes it a meeting point for these different cultures. This results in strong cultural diversity, as well as a large presence of international institutions, multinational companies and cultural events known worldwide. It is a very dynamic region where people are constantly in transit. The canton is located a short distance by car or train from many European cities, such as Geneva, Milan and Paris. It is also home to world-renowned medical-research institutions, such as the University of Lausanne and the Global Health Institute of the École polytechnique fédérale de

Lausanne (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne) (EPFL). Vaud has several hospitals and clinics, as well as numerous other health-care facilities, medical practices, and specialists, offering a wide range of health-care services. Life expectancy at birth per 100 000 population is 81.6 years for men and 85.5 years for women (3,4). The gross domestic product per capita is CHF 75 780 (5,6).

Cantons, such as Vaud, are direct democracies, where citizens can initiate the creation of laws and vote on them directly through referenda and popular initiatives. The cantons benefit from a significant degree of independence to shape and execute their public health priorities. The provision of health care in Switzerland is mutualistic, based on compulsory health insurance. However, the canton of Vaud finances most of its primary-health-care programmes and initiatives directly and indirectly.

Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): (i) moving towards Universal

Health Coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



Moving towards UHC

According to the Swiss Constitution, all citizens have the right to necessary medical care, even if they are uninsured or cannot afford to pay for it. The Swiss Federal Law on Health Insurance (LAMal) governs the Swiss health system. Its objective is to ensure UHC for all Swiss residents and foreign workers living in Switzerland. The canton of Vaud ensures UHC by respecting this law and providing health services to all residents, regardless of their financial situation or their state of health. Every citizen benefits from basic private health insurance. Insurance companies are required to offer standardized basic insurance covering all health needs. Health-insurance premiums are based on the age, gender, and place of residence of the insured, but are not influenced by state of health. Citizens can choose their own insurance company. The LAMal also makes provision for people on low incomes, older people, and people with disabilities: people with low incomes can benefit from subsidies to pay their health insurance premiums, while older people and people with disabilities are entitled to additional benefits (7). Federal and cantonal institutions also cover the insurance and complementary health-care costs of vulnerable people, such as asylum seekers. More than 20 hospitals and clinics are spread over the four geographical regions of the canton of Vaud, guaranteeing access to care for all the inhabitants of these regions.



Promoting health and well-being

The canton of Vaud has adopted the Public Health Act (Loi du 29 mai 1985 sur la santé publique, revised on 1st September 2021), which aims to safeguard the health of the population and encourage collective and individual responsibility in the field of health. This law provides measures to improve the quality of air, water and soil, as well as action to promote physical activity and healthy eating. It enables the cantonal health authorities to be very active in health promotion through numerous programmes, for example, on the prevention of chronic diseases and the promotion of free sports activities, programmes and spaces dedicated to sexual health or mental health (8).

The law also sets the ground for Vaud's prominent role in primary care. To ensure better and more equitable health for all residents and workers, the canton has set up community health centres, which offer primary health care targeting specific populations (e.g., vulnerable and undocumented people) and specific needs (e.g., basic health care, pediatric vaccination, gynaecology and psychiatry, screening for sexually transmitted diseases, spaces for discussion and support). This ensures that everyone has easy and affordable access to quality care, including, for example, rehabilitation and long-term-care facilities (8).

The canton of Vaud supports the development of skilled health professionals by offering continuous medical training, strengthening interprofessional collaboration and encouraging innovation in care practices.



Protecting against health emergencies

The cantonal authorities are responsible for the development and implementation of protection plans that include measures for prevention, preparation, and intervention in the event of an emergency (epidemics, natural and industrial disasters, etc.). These protection plans are regularly updated and revised to take new scientific developments and new health threats into account.

The canton also has a system for relieving congestion in hospitals to efficiently prevent saturation in all contexts. It is also very active in monitoring, preparing for, and responding to epidemics. The Office of the Cantonal Doctor (OCD) coordinates the data received from the public health stakeholders and anticipates measures to protect the population. In the event of an outbreak, investigations are carried out and the OCD leads the appropriate response. Finally, the canton of Vaud also organizes campaigns tailored to target populations, for example, on hand hygiene and antibiotic stewardship to prevent health-care-associated infections, or vaccination campaigns in populations with low coverage.

Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

Initiatives relative to the Mental Health Coalition

For a long time, the canton of Vaud has been developing specific programmes to improve the care and well-being of people with mental-health problems. Other Swiss cantons, as well as other European countries, have been inspired by these programmes to develop their own health systems (e.g., the Belgian mental-health-care reform (Psy107): intensive case management for severe mental disorders and substance-abuse disorders; transitional case management after psychiatric hospitalization; and individual placement and support. Currently, the canton of Vaud is developing mental-health-care programmes to promote access to care for migrants and other

highly vulnerable populations (e.g., drug users). Several initiatives aim to strengthen shared decision-making processes through the implementation of various forms of advance statements. In addition, several steps are being taken to reduce the use of coercion in psychiatric care: monitoring of coercive measures; strengthening collaboration among health professionals, magistrates and patients' associations; and development of specific teaching and research programmes involving expert patients. This work is of interest to many other cantons and is likely to be developed elsewhere.

Initiatives relative to the European Immunization Agenda 2030

The Federal Office of Public Health and the Federal Commission of Vaccination, in collaboration with all Swiss cantons, develop the National Vaccination Strategy (9) and associated action plans. The Strategy and related action plans aim to ensure optimal coverage at the individual and population

levels, and thus reduce the frequency and impact of diseases through a transparent, proactive, and participatory approach. The National Vaccination Strategy (9) is regularly updated and adapted to new vaccines, scientific evidence, and epidemiological situations.

According to the Epidemics Act (10), cantons are responsible for implementing, ensuring access to, and encouraging vaccination. Responsibility at the cantonal level allows for tailoring vaccination to the needs of the population and adapting it to the health system. Moreover, cantons may develop, finance, and implement specific vaccination campaigns according to health needs and political will.

In Vaud, tailoring the offer of and implementing vaccination are based on the principles of equity, vaccination opportunities at all ages, and the identification of populations and individuals in need. Accordingly, the canton is aiming to create stronger and more resilient immunization systems and structures, rather than focus on disease-specific goals.

Initiatives relative to healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insight

The canton promotes public health programmes that are adapted and tailored to the target populations and individuals. For example, the management and care of asylum seekers are culturally adapted and community-based in all their aspects (e.g., from translation/interpretation to the involvement of peers).

Vaud has implemented a comprehensive approach to sexual health, offering a wide range of services designed to meet the specific needs of the population, taking factors such as origin, gender, and sexual identity into consideration. The canton provides a variety of reproductive health services aimed at promoting well-being and enabling

individuals to make informed choices about their reproductive lives. These services encompass various aspects of reproductive health, including sexual education, family planning, contraception options, prenatal care, safe abortion services, and postnatal support. In addition, our programmes place emphasis on key points, such as, access to sexual-health consultations, the availability of community-based facilities for counselling and testing related to HIV and sexually transmitted infections, and initiatives to address issues of sexual violence and discrimination. The canton is at the forefront of efforts to provide support for individuals regarding gender identity.

The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. strategies and actions to reduce the impact of climate change, environmental pollution, and the effect of biodiversity loss on global health;
2. preparedness and response to emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases;
3. behavioural and social drivers for effective prevention and care.

Main partners and collaborators

These are:

the Federal Office of Public Health (Bern);

the Federal Office of Statistics (Neuchâtel);

the Swiss Health Promotion Foundation (Bern and Lausanne);

other Cantonal departments (particularly those dealing with education, welfare, environment and transport);

many stakeholders and nongovernmental organizations at the regional and cantonal levels;

the Fédération des hôpitaux Vaudois (FHV) (University Centre for General Practice and Public Health);

Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV);

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL);

the University of Lausanne (UNIL).

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