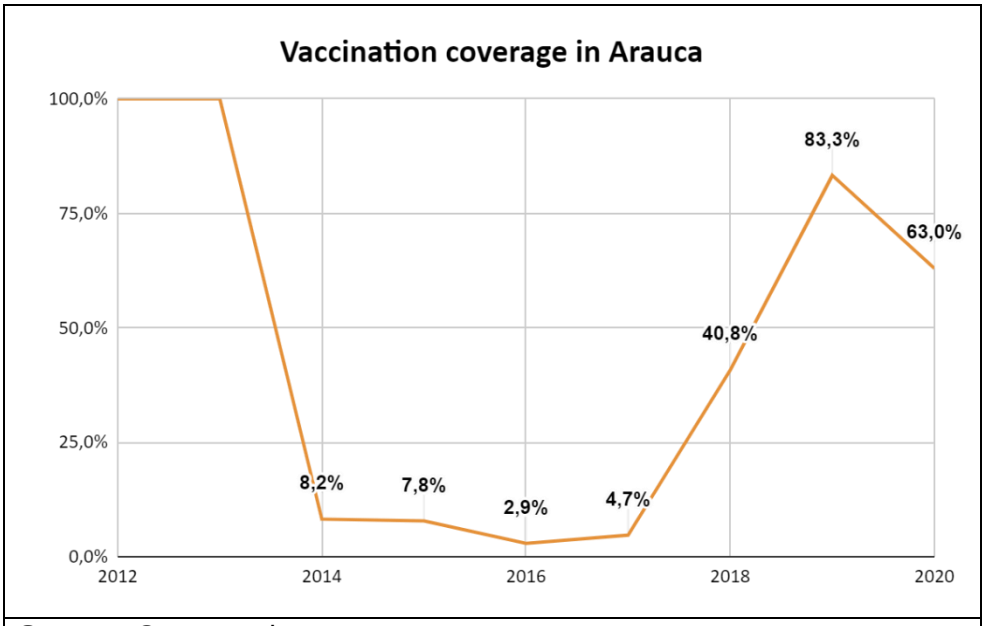
HPV Program in Colombia. A story of light and shadows.

American Cancer Society (ACS) and Colombian League Against Cancer.

Cervical Cancer (CC) is one of the leading causes of death in Colombian women and the third most frequent type of cancer in the female population with an annual incidence rate of 19.3 per 100,000. The vast majority (80%) of CC cases are attributable to the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which can be prevented through vaccination. Colombia went from being one of the leading countries in the world in HPV vaccination rates (with rates higher than 94% for both doses), to a poor immunization coverage levels of about 10.%. The reason for the dramatic decrease in vaccine rates is associated with a media spotlight caused by an episode of unknown etiology in the municipality of Carmen de Bolivar in 2014.,that was amplified by some local politicians and antivax groups Following the media scandal, health authorities opted to stop administering the vaccine in the schools and did not defend the program vigourosly.

To change this situation, in 2018 the Colombian League Against Cancer, in association with the American Cancer Society , conducted a pilot project in the department of Arauca, frontier with Venezuela. The intervention consisted of a communication strategy aimed and developed with different population groups that have a role in the vaccination decisión process: girls and adolescents in vaccination age, parents of adolescents girls, educational institutions, health professionals and local media.



Source: Own creation.

With this challenge in mind, the project had three main phases: research/indagation, design and testing, implementation and monitoring. Based on this route, the communications strategy was designed based on the social and cultural characteristics of the audiences involved in the decision to vaccinate against HPV, and specific communication channels and messages were created according to their characteristics. This strategy consisted of activities in the territory such as workshops, focus groups and interviews with key audiences in the territory, an information kit directed to girls and adolescents and also their parents, adittionally a plan for the dissemination of information in social networks and local media.

The results were very encouraging. Vaccination rate of the first dose increased significantly from 4.7% in 2017, to 41% in 2018, to 83% in 2019 and to 62% in 2020.

Unfortunately, the covid-19 pandemic appeared and the schools were closed, and obviously the campaign was affected.

The Colombian League Against Cancer, is committed to continue promoting health, especially the HPV vaccination process, therefore, expects the replication of this communications strategy in different territories of the country, in order to increase vaccination against HPV in Colombia in Colombian girls and adolescents.

Recent publications

1. Castro, C. (2018). “What happened in Colombia with the HPV Vaccination program- A story of light and shadows…happiness and tears…”- Cancer Therapy & Oncology International Journal, Juniper Publishers Inc., vol.9 (2): 46-47.
2. Castro, C. (2019). “HPV Vaccination in the world and in Colombia. Why so difficult?”. NeuroEconomix.,1-7.
3. Castro, C., Marín, M. y Muñoz, N. (2021). “HPV vaccination in Colombia, from nightmare to a bright and promising dawn”. HPV World, 105: 1-2.
4. Rosas, T., Cazap, E., Delgado, L., Castro. C., et. al. (2021). “Social distancing and economic crisis during COVID-19 pandemic reduced cancer control in Latin America and Will result in increased late-stage diagnoses and expense”. JCO Glob Oncol., 7: 694-703.

Biography

Dr Carlos Castro is a medical oncologist from University of British Columbia at Vancouver, Canadá. Has been the Director General of the National Cancer Institute of Colombia, Chairman of the Xaveriana University Cancer Center and the Institute of Oncology of Foundation Santa Fe of Bogota. Was appointed Viceminister of Health from Colombia. Member of the editorial board of “e-cancer”.

At the present, is the Medical and Cientific Director of the Colombian League against Cancer.