

# Hunting the Silent Killer

## A Comprehensive Public Health of the Croatian Hypertension League. Report on activities from December 2024 to May 2025

### AUTHORS:

BOJAN JELAKOVIĆ

IVAN PEĆIN

ANA JELAKOVIĆ

The Croatian Hypertension League has continued all activities and efforts in raising awareness about health lifestyle and adherence in general population and patients, as well as in decreasing clinical inertia among health care workers. It combines medical excellence, strategic communication, and community-based outreach to address major risk factors of cardio-kidney-neuro-metabolic diseases and mortality, where hypertension, the top silent killer no.1 and dyslipidemia, severely undiagnosed and untreated risk factor, are in the focus. The long-lasting national public health campaign *Hunting the Silent Killer* has started in 2019 and has become the most recognizable and impactful public health action in Croatia with an echo in many European countries, as well as in overseas countries such as Australia and Brasile. This action is under high patronage of the *Croatian Academy of Scientists and Arts*. The main aim of this action is to increase health literacy of general population, and to organize primary preventive examinations of population living in remote areas of Croatia which is lacking physicians and other healthcare workers. All educational activities are organized in a “classical” way on public places where citizens are examined and given educative materials and advice. The mobile team of the Croatian Hypertension League consists of leading experts in the field, nurses, pharmacists, kinesiologists, nutritionists, but also medical students from all schools of medicine in Croatia, school of pharmacy, kinesiology students and pupils from medical school for nurses. The reach of the campaign extended geographically—from Dubrovnik on the south of Adriatic coast to Rijeka at the North, and Vukovar and Osijek in the east; from Varaždin and Krapina in the North-West to the small village of Majur in the heart of Banija, the poorest and mostly forgotten part of Croatia. Our islands where health care in general is not at the level as it is in the continental part of Croatia are of special interest. Last four years we are organizing the *sub-hunt* named *Health on island*. In every location, the campaign met citizens where they were, both literally and figuratively, bringing healthcare into the heart of everyday life, in the footsteps of their homes. Each action provided citizens with the opportunity to check blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels, and body composition (metabolic scale), ECG, as well as to receive personalized consultations from medical professionals. In remote areas all cardio-kidney-metabolic risk factors are analyzed, and local physicians, or major when there are no health care workers, receive all results which can be used in regular clinic work. If someone needs additional examination and evaluation, Croatian Hypertension League organizes all further needed procedures either in local hospitals or in one of hospitals in Zagreb. Last year was very successful, and more than thirty educative public health actions were organized across Croatia and

several thousand citizens were examined and educated. One action should be particularly underlined. This is the summer action, a part of sub-hunt *Health on islands*, when a group of medical and pharmacy students and nurses went to the city of Benkovac instead of planned island Dugi otok when we heard that this city is lacking family physicians. During the five days, five hundred citizens of this small Dalmatian city were completely examined. The other arm for general population of the action is organized through the *digital cosmos* of the Croatian Hypertension League - web platform, newsletters, social networks. The other aim of our action, as already mentioned, is to increase the health literacy of health-care workers trying to improve knowledge and to decrease clinical inertia. This part also has two arms – the first one is “classical” face-to-face seminars and conferences. Here we must underline *School of communication in hypertension*. Education on how to communicate is still lacking in most of curriculum, and Croatian Hypertension League is trying to overcome this drawback, since good communication is the first and one of crucial steps to better disease control. The other arm here is digital as well and is organized via *HealthMed* educative web platform which is the most comprehensive medical digital educative site in Croatia. Every month two academic educative webinars are organized by key opinion leaders in cardio-kidney-neuro-metabolic diseases and two educative newsletters are sent to more than 10.000 healthcare workers.

The end of 2024 was also impressive when Croatian Hypertension League and *Hunting the Silent Killer* joined forces with the Zagreb Advent Run, Europe’s largest costumed charity race. As a key partner of the event, the campaign reached a broad and diverse audience, embedding its health message into a celebratory, high-energy atmosphere drawing attention to lifestyle-related risk factors such as sedentary lifestyle, physical inactivity, high salt intake, and insufficient intake of vegetables and fruits.

In 2025, the activities continued with the same enthusiasm. Giving more emphasize on hypertension and dyslipidemia, in 2023 we have started two sister sub-actions of the main *Hunting the silent killer* program. The first one is *Mission 70/26* which aim is that till 2026 70% of hypertensive patients treated be under control, and the other one *What is your number?.* has the aim to increase awareness about dyslipidemia i.e. hypercholesterolemia. Both campaigns support the core mission of empowering citizens to take ownership of their cardio-kidney-neuro-metabolic health, while also fostering accountability within the healthcare system. The first action in 2025 was organized in the city of Split when the whole **University of Split** officially became a member and partner of the Croatian Hypertension League. In Slavonski Brod,

the campaign aligned itself with an extraordinary humanitarian effort when at the Poloj Ultra marathon. Marko Kos, Croatian athlete and ambassador of *Hunting the Silent Killer*, broke a Guinness World Record by running 100 kilometers while pushing five children with disabilities in a specially adapted racing wheelchair. To increase awareness on obesity and chronic kidney disease at the World Obesity Day and World Kidney Day several public health actions were organized in the shopping centers in Zagreb, Osijek and Split. During the *Zagorje Days of the Croatian Hypertension League* public health action was organized in the city of Krapina and later in the city of Zlatar. On the way back to Zagreb we organized an action in Stenjevec, a suburban part of Zagreb. Campaign's spirit of engagement also flourished at the Rijeka Carnival, where the message of health promotion was delivered through creative expression and playful symbolism. Masks representing modern health threats, demons as we call them in the Croatian Hypertension league, high salt intake, sedentary lifestyle, obesity, smoking, not enough consumption of vegetables and fruits, incorrect blood pressure measurements, poor adherence, but also climate changes, air pollution and stress were "defeated" in a symbolic, festive procession. The event emphasized collective responsibility and reinforced the idea that public health is not just about individual decisions but also about social cohesion and shared values. Complementing these efforts, the campaign ensured that medically underserved and aging populations in more remote villages such as Majur or islands were not left behind. In these communities, detailed health assessments including ECG, central blood pressure measurements, arterial stiffness, ultrasound examination, and biochemical tests of all cardio-kidney-metabolic variables offered potentially life-saving insight, often for the first time in life. In April we organized an action during the symposium on Chronic non-communicable diseases in Zagreb, and during the symposium of obesity which was held in the city of Opatija we organized another action when we launched a public bus marked with signs of our action. Youth engagement remained a strategic pillar of the action. The second annual race, *Trk! Za zdravlje* ("Run! For Health"), was organized in Zagreb. This is a children's race designed to encourage healthy habits from an early age. Hereby we used sport as a medium for education and empowerment. Parallel to field actions, the campaign made a strong visual statement across public spaces. After cities of Varaždin, Osijek, Rijeka and Krapina this year city of Opatija joined the action by coloring public buses with educative messages and signs of our action. Furthermore, large-format billboards featuring campaign ambassadors—Tatjana Matejaš Cameron (Tajči), Juraj Šebalj, Tomislav Bralić, and Nikša Kaleb—appeared throughout

Zagreb, Šibenik, Split, Osijek, Opatija, Rijeka and many other places. Their message was clear and urgent: Do not ignore warning signs! Get checked! Take responsibility for your health! These familiar and famous faces helped expand the campaign's reach to broader segments of the population, including those less likely to interact with conventional medical messaging. Looking ahead, the month of May—globally recognized as Hypertension Awareness Month—will bring at least five additional actions across Croatia, culminating in World Hypertension Day. These events will reaffirm the League's enduring commitment to prevention, early diagnosis, and citizen empowerment. We will inform you about this action and all other things planned for this year in our next report. All these activities have the root in the EH-UH 1 study which started in 2000. From this long-ago time our motto was and will remain the one from William the Silent: ***One need not hope in order to undertake, nor succeed in order to persevere.*** In this case we completely disagree with the famous Edmont Dantes' quotation: All human wisdom is contained in these two words - Wait and Hope.

Through its holistic, inclusive, and scientifically grounded approach, *Hunting the Silent Killer* has become a model of how a national campaign can engage diverse communities, overcome healthcare disparities, and promote lasting behavioral change. The Croatian Hypertension League has demonstrated that public health, when delivered with compassion, creativity, and consistency, can become a shared national mission.

**With *Hunt targeting the silent killer(s)*, saving lives has never been easier.** Do not hesitate! Join us! Become a hunter for your health and truly happiness.