Croatian League for Hypertension and the Public Health Campaign "Hunting the Silent Killer" -some remarks for the first six months in 2026

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Over the past several years, the Croatian League for Hypertension has developed one of the most recognizable and far-reaching public health models in the Republic of Croatia: the ongoing campaign "**Hunting the Silent Killer,"** including program **"Do You Know Your Numbers?"** and "**Mission 70/26"**. The campaign is focused on the early detection and control of key cardio-kidney-metabolic risk factors: arterial hypertension, dyslipidemia, elevated glucose, obesity, physical inactivity, excessive salt intake, smoking, and other unhealthy behavioral patterns. The **Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts** is patron of this already internationally recongizes campaign. This has given community-based preventive work strong academic, professional, and social legitimacy. "Hunting the Silent Killer" demonstrates how scientific knowledge, clinical experience, and public health responsibility can be translated into concrete activities carried out among citizens, beyond the walls of hospitals and clinics. Briefly, we are following the idea given by Andrija Štamar who suggest and encourage thah phyisicans have to go to the people and educate, and not only wait in offices and cure and traet. By prevention we could and should overcome most consequences of not acting in the mean of prevention and increasing health literacy. Thus, the campaign arose from the need to ensure that prevention does not remain confined to professional documents, congress halls, or outpatient offices, but truly reaches citizens. The **Croatian Hypertension League** has developed a model that enables citizens to receive free preventive check-ups, counseling, and education where they live, work, study, run, ride bicycles, or otherwise participate in the life of their local community. In this way, prevention has become visible and accessible: in public squares, schools, pharmacies, public institutions, shopping centers, sports events, rural communities, island and remote areas, and, symbolically and internationally, in **the European Parliament**. The foundation of every field activity consists of measuring blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose; assessing body mass index and body composition; providing education on nutrition, physical activity, and salt intake; as well as conducting individualized discussions with healthcare professionals. In larger and more complex campaigns, the so-called "big hunts," a broader assessment of cardio-kidney-metabolic risk is carried out, including additional diagnostic procedures, counseling, and referral for further evaluation when necessary. In this way, a public health campaign becomes a real bridge between population-level prevention and clinical medicine. Hunting for the Sillent Killer last already eight years, permanently without break, every month, every week, every day. It is not a preelection sprint, or exhausting maraton after which prepared documents will never come into effect. The past year has been marked by two important records. Over a period of 365 days, 44 "hunts" were conducted throughout Croatia, during which more than 6,500 people were examined and educated. These data show that this is a continuous, operationally demanding, and logistically complex activity, rather than an occasional promotional campaign. It is important to emphasize that the activities are conducted not only in large cities, but also in areas where access to preventive healthcare is more limited. Such an approach directly reduces health inequalities and increases the likelihood that at-risk individuals will be identified before the development of myocardial infarction, stroke, chronic kidney disease, or other complications. One of the key pillars of the League's success is its volunteer network, which today includes several hundrerds volunteers from across Croatia. The special quality of this network lies in its interdisciplinarity. It includes not only medical students, but also physicians from various specialties and subspecialties, nurses and technicians, pharmacists, clinical pharmacists, kinesiologists, nutritionists, dietitians, psychologists, psychiatrists, students of medical secondary schools (future nurses), and other experts who place their knowledge and time at the service of the community. This model shows that the prevention of chronic noncommunicable diseases does not belong to a single profession, but requires the joint work of the healthcare system, education, sports, local government, the media, and civil society. The role of **pharmacists** is particularly important. Croatian experience from the **May Measurement Month** program has shown how powerful and still underused pharmacies are as sites for population screening, education, and the monitoring of persons with arterial hypertension. In previous MMM activities in Croatia, a broad network of public communiry pharmacies and pharmacists was involved, confirming that pharmacies, because of their accessibility, the trust of citizens, and frequent contact with chronically ill patients, can be a key partner in controlling hypertension and other risk factors. This year's MMM—Month of Measurement—is expected to include more than 11,000 people with measured "numbers," through which Croatia once again aims to compete for the highest international achievements, including an attempt to approach a Guinness World Record in mass blood pressure measurement and the assessment of related risk factors. A special place in this year's activities was occupied by the observance of World Hypertension Day in May. The Croatian League for Hypertension marked it through **a "children's week,"** sending the important message that prevention begins in childhood. The activities included preventive examinations in a primary school, then in a secondary school, and the third annual children's race "RUN! for Health!". The race brought together around 150 children and approximately the





same number of parents, grandparents, and other family members. It was held under the message **"Do You Know Your Number? Be a hunter, not the hunted!".** In this way, **health literacy** was linked to play, movement, family, and a positive experience, which is particularly important in building lasting healthy habits. According to the League's records, during Hypertension Week more than 1,500 people were examined across Croatia, and the week concluded with a major event in city of Pula. The education of healthcare professionals is another equally important branch of activity. Through webinars and professional content stored on the **HealthMed platform**, the Croatian League for Hypertension provides physicians, pharmacists, nurses, and other healthcare professionals with continuous access to education. This digital approach is especially important because it enables the standardized dissemination of professional messages beyond large centers and congress halls. Healthcare professionals can access content at their own pace on arterial hypertension, adherence, clinical inertia, dyslipidemia, obesity, proper blood pressure measurement, and other topics important for daily practice. In this way, "Hunting the Silent Killer" is not only an action for citizens, but also a lasting educational framework for the healthcare system. In addition to webinars, the League has also developed newsletter communication aimed at healthcare professionals. The newsletters reach approximately 10,000 email addresses of healthcare professionals, with an open rate higher than the industry average for comparable healthcare communication campaigns. These newsletters are not merely event announcements, but structured educational tools: they announce public health actions, direct readers to professional articles, webinars, and recommendations, motivate participation, and connect fieldwork with the academic and clinical community. In this way, the League is building a recognizable communication channel that simultaneously informs, educates, and mobilizes. An important complement to professional work is the **School of Communication in Hypertension**. It starts from the insight that knowledge about a disease alone is not sufficient if a physician, pharmacist, or other healthcare professional does not know how to communicate clearly, empathetically, and motivationally with a person who needs to change lifestyle habits or take therapy regularly. In the treatment of hypertension, dyslipidemia, and obesity, communication is a therapeutic tool. The School of Communication therefore raises the competencies of professionals in discussing risk, adherence, motivation, behavior change, and shared decision-making. **The media and public visibility** of the "Hunt" has been further strengthened by **campaign ambassadors**. Dr. Natko Beck, Tatjana Cameron Tajči, Nikša Kaleb, Juraj Šebalj, Tomislav Bralić, Adam Končić, Đani Stipaničev, the young musician Odin Sokač, and the Sinković brothers have placed their names, reputations, and public visibility in the service of prevention. Their role is not decorative, but communicative: they translate professional messages into the language of the wider public. Đani Stipaničev has made an additional contribution to education through a song about salt, reminding audiences that excessive table salt intake remains one of the key modifiable risk factors for arterial hypertension. The ambassadors show that the message of health can be conveyed through music, sport, theatre, motorsport, public appearance, and everyday culture. A particularly important advancement is represented by **the Huntmobile**, the mobile team of the Croatian League for Hypertension developed in partnership with Auto Hrvatska. Mobility has changed the reach of the campaign. The Huntmobile enables teams to move more quickly and efficiently to remote places, local events, schools, rural communities, and areas where preventive services are not as accessible as in major cities. In this way, "Hunting the Silent Killer" has gained additional operational strength and become even more far-reaching in its geographic reach. Cooperation with local communities is also visible through participation in the **200th Samobor Carnival,** one of the best-known Croatian carnival events. The Croatian League for Hypertension succeeded in incorporating a public

health message into an event deeply rooted in local tradition. "Hunt for the Silent Killer" was also presented on stage, through which the message of hypertension, cholesterol, and other risk-factor prevention reached an audience that might not attend a conventional health lecture. In this way, it was shown that prevention does not have to be a dry, administrative, or intimidating message, but can become part of local culture, humor, sport, and solidarity. The League achieves a similar synergy between health and movement with **Run Croatia** and numerous running events. Through **the Zagreb Advent Run** and other races involving more than 10,000 adult runners over the past three years, participants ran with the message of the League. The partnership between sport and public health makes it possible to convey the message about blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose to a population that might not come to a traditional health lecture, but will receive it through an event that connects movement, togetherness, and social responsibility. **Večernji list's cycling event** is another example of how the messages of the "Hunt" are spread through mass recreational gatherings. The Croatian League for Hypertension is participating for the third consecutive year. **Media partners** play an exceptional role in the success of the campaign. Cooperation with **Croatian Radiotelevision** is especially notable through the **"Classroom"** public service announcement, which was broadcast for four months on all four national TV channels. The spot carried the campaign's message to a broad national audience, while several appearances on the program **"Good Morning, Croatia,"** one of the most watched morning television formats in Croatia, further enabled academician Bojan Jelaković, Professor Ivan Pećin, and other team members to explain why blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, body weight, salt, and adherence are issues that directly determine citizens' life expectancy and quality of life. In this way, the Hunt went beyond the limits of a field campaign and became **a national educational message.** One of the strongest international moments took place on 8 April 2026 in **the European Parliament in Brussels**, where League s initiative "Know Your Numbers: Cardiovascular Health Check Zone" was held. The Croatian model of prevention was presented at the very center of European decision-making. The examinations included the assessment of cardio-kidney-vascular risk, measurement of blood pressure and other risk factors, and the education of European officials, Members of the European Parliament, and staff. This activity had strong symbolic value: it showed that what is often only planned at the European level in strategic documents has already been alive in Croatian communities for years. Activities that in many European countries are still only "words on paper" are already alive in Croatian communities and literally saving lives. This is precisely the key added value of "Hunting the Silent Killer": it is not merely an awareness campaign, but an operational model for the implementation of prevention. The international resonance of "Hunt for the Silent Killer" is also visible through the interest shown by professional societies, European



initiatives, and other countries in the Croatian model. The Croatian Hunt has found an echo in other states as well. In Prague, public buses carry messages about preventive check-ups, giving the idea of a public health message in public space a new European dimension. In Poland, activities have been launched to screen children for dyslipidemia and to run a campaign against elevated cholesterol, while in Brazil medical students became even more active after seeing how diligently students in Zagreb participate in field-based public health activities. These examples indicate that the Croatian model can inspire other environments as well, especially when expertise, youthful enthusiasm, strong communication, and clearly measurable goals are combined. Previous reports have already highlighted that the campaign spread from urban centers to distant and less accessible regions of Croatia, and the logic of the work is always the same: reach people, measure their numbers, explain the risk, and encourage change. The League s initiatives "Do You Know Your Number?" and "Mission 70/26" further structure the public health message: personal risk cannot be recognized if it is not measured. Plans for continuing activities include *summer hunts* in Makarska and its hinterland, further expansion of mobile work, continuation of MMM measurements,



strengthening of the pharmacy network, continued education of healthcare professionals through the HealthMed platform, maintenance of newsletter communication, further involvement of schools, sports events, and local communities, as well as strengthening the international visibility of the Croatian model. It is particularly important to continue collecting standardized data, because it is precisely the combination of fieldwork, education, and scientific data processing that distinguishes this campaign from an ordinary promotional activity.

In conclusion, the activities of the Croatian League for Hypertension and "Hunting the Silent Killer" represent an example of modern, multidisciplinary, and socially embedded prevention of chronic noncommunicable diseases. The strength of this model lies not only in the number of citizens examined, but in the change of culture: citizens are encouraged to know their own numbers, healthcare professionals to communicate more clearly and act more proactively, volunteers to develop empathy and experience within the community, and institutions to recognize prevention as a national priority.

The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as a partner and patron, thus supports a model in which science, professional expertise, and the community act together. "Hunting the Silent Killer" shows that prevention can be professional, scientifically grounded, communicatively strong, and deeply human. For precisely this reason, this campaign goes beyond the framework of an individual initiative and becomes a Croatian public health model worthy of lasting academic, institutional, and international attention.