

## FOREWORD

## The identity of public health in COVID-19 times

The COVID-19 has hit the world with devastating clinical, economic and social burden. If any constructive element arises from this tragedy, it is a greater awareness of the key role of public health, which will also be instrumental in the way out of the crisis. Defined in broader terms as the science of protecting the safety and improving the health of communities through education, policy making and research for disease prevention, public health action has guided COVID-19 surveillance and monitoring (1,2), the adoption of containment and mitigation measures (3), has informed the management and organization of healthcare delivery in emergency and has fuelled health communication and education to the general population.

The collective dimension of health and wellbeing is the ultimate aim in the fight against COVID-19. The public health community feels strong the responsibility of contributing towards this aim at the policy, research and practice levels. At the research level the Covid-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented focus of the world's scientific community on one topic (4). At *Acta Biomedica* we have encouraged and supported the production and dissemination of public health research outputs since the very beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak (5,6). With this supplement on COVID-19 we renew our efforts towards evidence gathering, well aware of the role of public health evidence in informing the planning, implementation and evaluation of COVID-19 response (7). We are glad to present the current supplement that brings together important updates: researchers from Vita-Salute San Raffaele University assess age-standardized COVID-19 mortality rates in selected metropolitan regions around the world putting Lombardy region COVID-19 burden data into context (8). Colleagues from the University of Parma – at national reference laboratory for COVID-19 as well for influenza surveillance (9) – report key find-

ings from four-month long virological surveillance of COVID-19 reflecting on the clinical and public health meaning of decreasing viral loads (10). Aspects related to health services delivery and management during the COVID-19 outbreak are explored by Castaldi et al. (11) and Rovere Querini et al. (12), the latter presenting one of the first cases of COVID-19 hospital follow-up clinics. Infection control in healthcare settings and its determinants are explored by Pasquarella et al (Parma) (13) reporting preliminary interesting data on surfaces contamination, by Squeri et al (Messina) (14) reporting on healthcare workers surveillance and contact tracing in Southern Italy, and by Auxilia et al (Milan) (15) reporting on hospital acquired infections trends during the COVID-19 emergency. Guidelines and safety protocols to be adopted for balneotherapy are outlined by Clementi et al (16). Academic Architects, experts in Public Health, from Politecnico di Milano, in co-operation with colleagues from Sapienza University of Rome (17) provides meaningful insight on design aspects related to quality of care and safety in healthcare facilities, but also related to quality housing and its impact on health and wellbeing during COVID-19 lockdown and beyond (18,19). As some stimulating reflections focus on how to prepare to manage the long-term impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency in Italy both within (20) and outside (21) the healthcare sector, we are confident solid ongoing research projects (22) will soon provide further outputs to keep advancing public health knowledge and inform its action towards population health and wellbeing.

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