



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA  
MINISTRY FOR HEALTH  
AND ACTIVE AGEING

13th Biennial Conference

# From Vision to Action: Shaping the Future of Primary Health Care

3rd October, 2025

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“We are committed to excellence; to the highest possible level and quality of integrated primary health care service delivery, while we continue to explore new avenues to increase patients’ accessibility further in the community.”

Hon. Jo Etienne Abela



## Foreword by the Minister for Health and Active Ageing

The foundation of a robust and resilient health system is primary health care. Its success depends not just on the commitment of our frontline staff but also on the professionalism, collaboration, and open communication that unite us. The value of multidisciplinary collaboration was demonstrated by the recent panels, where the sharing of ideas reinforced our common goal to provide our communities the best care possible.

The Ministry remains fully committed to supporting this mission. We are investing in resources, training, and infrastructure to ensure that Primary Health Care remains accessible, high-quality, and equitable for all. We also recognise the tireless contributions of our frontline staff and administrative teams, whose commitment and compassion continue to drive excellence in patient care.

Our vision for the future is one of innovation, service integration, and ongoing progress. We encourage every employee to incorporate the insightful conversations from these panels into their daily duties. Even though there are still obstacles to overcome, cooperation, fortitude, and a common goal will enable us to fortify our healthcare system in the future.

Hon. Malcolm Paul  
Agius Galea



## Foreword by the Parliamentary Secretary for Active Ageing

It's a great honor to share a few thoughts ahead of this year's PHC Biennial Conference, an important space for healthcare professionals to come together, share experiences, and reflect on how we continue strengthening primary care across Malta.

Primary health care has long been described as the foundation of any modern health system, but in recent years, we've seen just how essential it is to our everyday lives. Whether we speak about community-based services, chronic illness management, or ageing with dignity, it's clear that the work done at the primary level touches every corner of our population.

From my role within the Active Ageing portfolio, I have seen first-hand the importance of building a system that meets people where they are. Many elderly persons want to live as independently as possible, for as long as possible; and this means having access to services that are close to home, accessible, and sensitive to the realities of growing older.

It is only through collaboration and mutual respect between health professionals, administrators, and policymakers that we can build a system that is truly prepared for the future.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all those working in the health sector, especially primary care. Your role is not just technical, it is deeply human, and the impact you leave on people's lives is long-lasting.

Ing. Karl Farrugia



## Message by the CEO

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 13th Biennial Conference on Primary Health Care, held here in Malta. This year's theme — "From Vision to Action" — could not be more fitting, as it reflects the journey we are collectively undertaking: transforming aspirations into concrete outcomes for the benefit of our patients and communities.

Primary Health Care has always been built on vision — the vision of accessible, inclusive, and holistic care, where the patient is at the very centre. But vision alone is not enough. What truly matters is how we translate that vision into daily practice, into improved services, and into healthier lives.

In Malta, we have taken important steps to turn this vision into action. The inauguration of the Southern Regional Hub, the expansion of community clinics, the development of nurse-led and allied health services, and the successful integration of telemedicine are just some of the tangible results of this effort. We have also strengthened our workforce, invested in training, and achieved new international quality certifications — all part of our drive to ensure excellence in care.

Yet our work is far from done. Challenges such as non-communicable diseases, equity, and sustainability continue to demand our focus. They call on us not only to design forward-looking policies but also to act decisively, creatively, and collaboratively.

This conference provides the ideal platform to share knowledge, exchange experiences, and inspire one another in the ongoing journey from vision to action. Together, we can ensure that Primary Health Care remains strong, innovative, and responsive to the needs of our people. On behalf of Primary Health Care Malta, I warmly thank all participants, speakers, and organisers for making this gathering possible. May it serve as a catalyst for continued progress and collaboration in our shared mission.

Welcome and I wish you all a fruitful and inspiring conference.

Sincerely,  
**Ing. Karl Farrugia**  
Chief Executive Officer, Primary Health Care,  
Ministry for Health and Active Ageing, Malta



## Message by the Organising Committee

**“for meaningful dialogue and the exchange of expertise, but will also provide a platform to share best practices and strengthen professional partnerships.”**

It is with great enthusiasm that we welcome all participants to the 13th Primary Health Care Biennial Conference, **‘From Vision to Action: Shaping the Future of Primary Health Care.’**

This year’s conference brings together distinguished speakers, professionals, and participants who share a common commitment to advancing knowledge, driving innovation, and fostering collaboration in the field of primary health care. We trust that the programme will not only provide valuable opportunities for meaningful dialogue and the exchange of expertise, but will also provide a platform to share best practices and strengthen professional partnerships.

The Organising Committee extends its sincere appreciation to all speakers and attendees for their contribution to the success of this event. May this conference inspire, energise, and enrich your work, while reinforcing our shared mission of shaping a healthier and more sustainable future for our communities. Together, through vision, action, and collaboration, we can make a lasting impact in advancing primary health care for generations to come.



“Committed to excellence; to the highest possible level and quality of integrated primary health care service delivery.”

## Ing. Karl Farrugia

Chief Executive Officer,  
Primary Health Care, Malta

Ing. Karl Farrugia was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Primary Health Care in August 2024. He brings over two decades of leadership experience in health systems, biomedical engineering, and strategic management within Malta's Ministry for Health.

Starting his career as a Biomedical Engineer in 2001, Ing. Farrugia went on to serve as Director of Materials Management & Logistics at Mater Dei Hospital (2007) and later as CEO of the Central Procurement and Supplies Unit (2011), overseeing a budget of over €500 million for medical supplies and services. He also led the Pharmacy of Your Choice scheme and the National Blood Transfusion Centre, strengthening Malta's frontline health provision.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, he represented Malta in the EU Joint Procurement Strategic Action Group, securing critical protective equipment and vaccines. For his exceptional service during this period, he was awarded the Medal for Service to the Republic in 2022.

Today, as CEO of Primary Health Care, Ing. Farrugia is steering reforms that expand capacity, modernise infrastructure, strengthen the workforce, and embrace innovation. His leadership continues to focus on efficiency, accountability, and excellence, ensuring that Primary Health Care remains inclusive, resilient, and centred on the needs of patients.



## Dr. Anabelle Mizzi



BSc (Hons), MSc, PhD,  
FFPM RCPS (Glasgow)

Dr. Anabelle Mizzi is a Podiatrist with a special interest in the management of peripheral arterial disease. She completed a Masters and PhD in the field and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, Faculty of Podiatric Medicine. She also serves on the review board for the Australian guidelines on diagnosis and management of peripheral artery disease. Collaborating with vascular surgeons, in 2006 she established the Vascular Podiatry clinic in Primary Health. The clinic has now expanded to include a team of podiatrists providing an efficient fast-track referral system and vascular monitoring for patients attending primary health care, contributing to the fight against limb loss.

## Dr. Bryen Gatt



M.D., PGD/Ms.c PC GP,  
MMCFD

Principal General Practitioner,  
Victoria Health Centre

Dr. Bryen Gatt serves as Principal General Practitioner at Victoria Health Centre, Gozo, a role he has held since 2019, where he was instrumental in coordinating PHC's Gozo COVID-19 vaccination programme. He earned his M.D. from the University of Malta in 1997 and began his career at St. Luke's Hospital, gaining broad experience across multiple specialities before moving into General Practice in 2000. A registered specialist in Family Medicine with a postgraduate Master's degree from Ulster University, Dr. Gatt is also a member of the Malta College of Family Doctors. He combines his clinical expertise with a keen interest in technology to enhance patient care.

## Dr. Claire Saliba Thorne



PhD, MSc, BSc(Hons)  
Melit.SRPod. MPodA

Dr. Claire Saliba Thorne is a state registered Podiatrist who holds a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Podiatry and a Masters degree in Clinical Biomechanics from the University of Malta. During the past 13 years, she has developed a special interest in Clinical Biomechanics of the lower limb and has been working in this field ever since, diagnosing and treating patients who present with lower limb musculoskeletal pathologies and injuries. Recently, she fulfilled a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Podiatry which explored the importance of objective assessment of the lower limb focusing on patients at risk of ulceration.

## Dr. Dorothy Zammit



MD, MMCFD, Mr.CGP(Int)  
M.Sc. Health Systems Management  
and Leadership  
PGCert. Infection Control  
Principal General Practitioner -  
Office of the Clinical Chairperson

Dr. Dorothy Zammit, Principal General Practitioner, Malta's Primary Health Care system, leads the Infection Prevention and Antimicrobial Stewardship Unit. She also serves as Manager for Non-Communicable Diseases and chairs the Quality Multidisciplinary Committee, driving strategic initiatives in patient safety, clinical governance, and service optimisation. Dr. Zammit represents Primary Health Care Malta in the WHO-supported TAP Project, contributing to the development and implementation of national antimicrobial stewardship strategies in collaboration with key stakeholders. She also serves as the Deputy Chair of the Generic Preparedness Committee. She holds a Master's degree in Health Systems Management and a Postgraduate Certificate in Infection Control, bringing clinical, leadership, and policy experience to her role.

## Dr. Francesca Akanji

MD (Melit.), MSc. in  
Healthcare Management  
(Essex)

Senior General Practitioner  
& GP Trainer

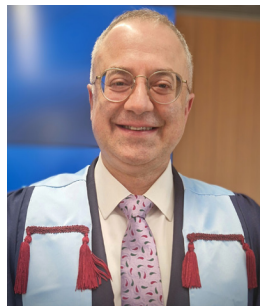


Dr. Francesca Akanji is a Senior General Practitioner within Malta's Primary Health Care. She earned a Master's degree with distinction in Healthcare Management, focusing her research on optimising appointment clinic systems. As a GP trainer, she mentors trainees towards their final professional examinations, fostering both clinical competence and leadership skills. Passionate about service improvement, Dr. Akanji actively supports initiatives enhancing patient experience and multidisciplinary teamwork in primary care. Her current interests include change management and GP education. At this year's conference, she joins the panel to share insights on leadership and innovation in primary healthcare.

## Dr. Gunther Abela

MMCFD, Mr.CEM, FIMC.RCS(Ed),  
PG Cert Clin Lds (Open), MSc. Clinical  
Leadership (Swansea), LLCM

Associate Dean Primary Care  
Barts and the London SMD



Dr. Gunther Abela is the Clinical Chairperson of Primary Health Care. He is a Specialist in Family Medicine (PGP) with additional expertise in immediate (urgent) care, minor surgery and clinical/medical leadership. His qualifications include a Membership of the RCeM and a Fellowship of the RCS (Edin) in Immediate Medical Care. He additionally holds an MSc. in Clinical Leadership (Swansea University) and a Postgraduate Certificate in Clinical Leadership (Open University). He held the role of Postgraduate Training Coordinator in Family Medicine for 15 years and was actively involved in Resuscitation training. He is also an Associate Dean for Primary Care in the Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry. His previous and current roles span clinical practice, teaching, research, and medical management, reflecting a strong commitment to healthcare leadership, education and innovation.

## Dr. Sascha Reiff

Consultant in Public Health Medicine



Dr. Sascha Reiff is a Consultant in Public Health Medicine and Clinical Lead of the National Screening Centre since 2020. He has a history of several leadership positions at both national and international levels, with an academic background in public health (MSc.), and healthcare management (MBA).

## Dr. Sonia Abela

MD, MMCFD, FHEA, PgCAP (QMUL),  
Dip.Ther. (ICGP), Dip.Women's Health (ICGP),  
E.C.E.Pall.Care, Cert.Diabetes Mgmt, FLCM

Principal General Practitioner  
(Telemedicine Centre, PHC)  
Postgraduate Training Coordinator  
in Family Medicine, STPFM



Dr. Sonia Abela graduated from the University of Malta in 1997 and since 1999 she has been working with PHC. She was certified as a family medicine specialist in 2004 and has been an active GP trainer for the past 14 years. Since 2021 she was appointed as principal general practitioner and Telemedicine Clinical Lead. She holds postgraduate qualifications in Therapeutics, Women's Health, Medical Education, Diabetes Management and Palliative Care. Dr. Abela is a recognised Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK) and is currently finalising her M. Ed. thesis with the University of Dundee. Together with two colleagues, she was appointed as STPFM postgraduate training coordinator in 2024, and worked as a GP tutor and assistant lecturer with Barts' and the London Medical School.

## Dr. Justine Farrugia Preca

MD, MMCFD, Mr.CGP (Int),  
PG Cert ID (UOL), MSc. (BSMs).

Principal General Practitioner  
Immunisation Department



Dr. Justine Farrugia Preca is a Principal General Practitioner and has served as the National Immunisation Service Manager since 2023. Her primary role in Primary Health Care focuses on facilitating access to vaccination, monitoring vaccine uptake, and fostering interdepartmental collaboration to enhance national vaccination coverage. These efforts aim to protect both vaccinated individuals and those who cannot be vaccinated, through the achievement of herd immunity. Recent expansions to the national immunisation schedule—both in the variety of vaccines offered and the population groups targeted—have further highlighted the importance of coordinated public health messaging and cross-sectoral engagement.

## Dr. Myra K Tilney

MD FRCP FRCP(Edin)  
FACP FEFIM MBA (Henley)  
Consultant physician, Dept of Primary Care  
Resident Senior Lecturer, Department of  
Medicine, University of Malta  
Emeritus Regional Advisor for the  
Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh



Q. MD exceptional performance, and trained in Malta, Belgium and UK, and recipient of various bursaries and scholarships. Her interests include cardiovascular disease and its prevention, and quality of care. National Lead in the European Atherosclerosis Society (EAS) Familial Hypercholesterolaemia Studies Collaboration and the EAS Lipid Clinic Network. She established an FH Register, and is designing and exploring the implementation of a tool for clinical process improvement in this underdiagnosed and undertreated condition which results in premature cardiovascular disease. She has sat on various national and international educational and professional committees, and as expert reviewer for EU research projects.

## Dr. Elayne Azzopardi

Speech and Language Therapist PhD(MMU),  
MSc. (MMU), BSc (Hons)(Melit)



Dr. Elayne Azzopardi is a Higher Allied Health Practitioner, Speech Language Pathologist within the Speech Language Centre, Primary Health Care. She is responsible for the Early Prevention, Assessment and Intervention Area of Practice. She holds a PhD and MSc. in the field and has international experience as both a clinician and a postdoctoral researcher. Committed to advancing research and evidence-based client-centred care, she has published across diverse health disciplines. In addition to her clinical responsibilities, Dr. Azzopardi is a casual lecturer and clinical educator with the University of Malta, contributing to the training and professional growth of future practitioners

## Ms. Jacqueline Sciberras

Executive Allied Health Practitioner  
M.Sc. HPHI (RGU Aberdeen)  
B.Sc.(Hons.) Health Science (Melit.)  
Dip. Physio. Malta



Ms. Jacqueline Sciberras is a physiotherapist with over 30 years of experience dedicated to clinical practice and advancing allied health services. After graduating in 1986, she pursued a degree in Health Science at the University of Malta and an MSc. in Health Improvement & Health Promotion at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. Her professional focus has been in orthopaedics and musculoskeletal care, with extensive work in orthopaedic wards and musculoskeletal outpatient services at PHC. Since 2017, she has served as Executive Allied Health Practitioner at PHC, combining clinical expertise with managerial responsibilities to enhance patient care and allied health services.

## Mr. Jurgen Bonett

Practice Nurse Tissue Viability  
M.Sc. Clinical Skin Integrity & Wound Management  
M.Sc. Applied Nutrition  
B.Sc. Nursing



Mr. Jurgen Bonett is a Tissue Viability Practice Nurse within Malta's Primary Health Care, with a special interest in managing complex wounds. He began his nursing career in 2008 and has gained experience in both secondary and primary care, focusing on tissue viability since 2016. In 2024, he was appointed as a Practice Nurse specialising in this field. Jurgen played a key role in launching the Vascular Clinic at the Hamrun Community Clinic for patients with peripheral vascular disease and provides training to nursing staff across Malta and Gozo. He holds a master's degrees in clinical Skin Integrity and Wound Management, and in Applied Nutrition.

## Mr. Lawrence Bonavia

SRN, BSc (Hons) Nursing,  
Dip Pol Stud, Post Grad Dip  
Ger and Geria. MSc. Health Sciences  
(Nursing)



Mr. Lawrence Bonavia is the Chief Nursing Manager at the PHC. He has experience in numerous areas related to Health and Elderly care. Lawrence obtained his first qualification in Nursing in 1988 and started his career working at SLH. Subsequently, he pursued further studies and worked in numerous areas, including, St Vincent De Paule Residence, Rehab Hospital Kren Grech, Mental Health, National Screening Service and was also in charge of Sir Paul Boffa Hospital for several years. Whilst working in all these areas he introduced a number of initiatives. He also holds a part-time teaching post within the Faculty at Health Sciences, UOM.

## Ms. Marcon Grima

Chief Nursing Manager  
PG Dip HSc HSM (Melit)  
Dip Adult T & D (Melit)



Ms. Marcon Grima has served in Primary Care since 1988, holding extensive experience in both clinical practice and management. Appointed Chief Nursing Manager in November 2018, she pursued further studies at the University of Malta in Health Services Management and Adult Training and Development. Throughout her leadership, she has been instrumental in advancing patient-centred services, including the establishment of the Ophthalmic Centre of Excellence with nurse-led screening clinics, expansion of plaster slab services, and development of other nurse- and midwifery-led initiatives within health centres and community clinics. She pioneered the introduction of the Practice Nurse role in Tissue Viability within Primary Health Care. Since 2025, she has overseen Practice Nurses and training initiatives, working towards an accredited training programme, reflecting her commitment to service excellence in Primary Care.

## Dr. Marius Caruana

MD MMCDF  
PGP - Migrant Health Service  
Chair PHC Resuscitation Committee  
Chair PHC Generic Preparedness Committee



Dr. Marius Caruana MD MMCDF graduated from the University of Malta in 2004 and specialized in Family Medicine in 2013. He is a certified GP trainer and currently is the Principal General Practitioner at the Migrant Health Service, Primary Health Care's outreach GP service to migrants within the Detention Service Agency. He was Malta's representative on the Committee for the Prevention of Ill-Treatment and Torture (CPT) within the Council of Europe between 2021 and 2023 and is Chair of the Primary Health Care's Generic Preparedness Committee and Resuscitation Committee as well as co-Chair of the Malta Resuscitation Council.

## Dr. Patrick Galea



MD, Mr.CGP, MMCFD, MSc. Surg. (Edin), ESSQ

Dr. Patrick Galea graduated from the University of Malta in 2010 and completed his specialisation in Family Medicine in 2015, alongside a Masters in Surgical Sciences at the University of Edinburgh in 2014. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he was entrusted with establishing and leading Malta's Telemedicine Department. He is currently Principal General Practitioner at Mosta Health Centre, Clinical Senior Lecturer and CBME Lead with Queen Mary University, Malta. Dr. Galea has led initiatives including GU Health and Wellbeing Clinics and the Clinical Streaming Project at Mosta Health Centre.

## Dr. Renzo Pace Asciak



Consultant Public Health Medicine  
Head of IT, International Projects and Statistics  
M.Sc. (Hlth. Info. Science, Warw)  
M.Sc. (Pub. Hlth., Malta)  
Int. Dipl. (Comp. Studies)

Dr. Renzo Pace Asciak is a Consultant in Public Health Medicine and Head of the IT Section, International Projects and Statistics at the Primary Health Care Headquarters, Ministry for Health and Active Ageing, Malta. He holds a Master's in Health Information Science (with Distinction) from the University of Warwick, a Master's in Public Health Medicine from the University of Malta, and an International Diploma in Computer Studies. He previously headed the Department of Health Information for several years strengthening national health data systems and evidence-based planning. Dr. Pace Asciak has represented Malta on numerous EU bodies and contributed to publications at Eurostat in Luxembourg. He has led several EU and WHO projects, including implementing the Electronic Patient Record System in Primary Health Care. His current focus is on advancing digital health and data-driven innovation to support patient-centred care.

## Ms. Roberta Galea



Entity Management PHC  
MA (Melit) Adult Education  
M.Sc. (Dublin) Speech and Language Studies  
B.Sc. (Hons) Communication Therapy

Ms. Roberta Galea graduated from the University of Malta in 2004 as a Speech and Language Pathologist. She obtained a Master's in Speech and Language Studies from Trinity College Dublin in 2009 and a Master's in Adult Education from the University of Malta in 2013. Her career began at Stewarts Hospital, Ireland, before joining Malta's public service in 2008. She worked at Primary Health Care and Karin Grech Rehabilitation Hospital, where she led the SLP team for eight years. Since March 2022, Roberta has served as Entity Lead Primary Health Care. She also supports the Directorate for Allied Health Services, chairs its Marketing Working Group, and contributes to the implementation of Erasmus placements.

## Mr. Ronald Barbara



MSc. in Healthcare Management  
and Leadership  
Charge Nurse

Mr. Ronald Barbara began his career as a State-Registered Nurse in 1985, amassing 40 years of experience in nursing, locally and internationally. He progressed to the position of Charge Nurse, managing a multidisciplinary team, delivering community care, cardiac intensive care nursing, caring for patients after open-heart surgery and providing cardiology nursing services in both public and private healthcare settings. (2012) Ronald further enhanced his leadership, management and surgical nursing skills during his time in Oxfordshire, UK, Nuffield Health Group, as Cardiac Liaison Charge Nurse, focusing on staff training and maintaining clinical governance standards. (2019) Ronald returned to Malta and joined the Primary Health Care administrative nursing management team.

## Mr. Rosario Mizzi

B.Sc. (Hons) Comm. Ther.; M.A.(Ling);  
M.A.(Cult. Her. Man.)



Mr. Rosario Mizzi graduated from the University of Malta in 1999 with a B.Sc. (Hons) in Communication Therapy. He has been a Speech and Language Pathologist in the Public Service since then. He holds two master's degrees in Linguistics and Cultural Heritage Management and is pursuing a third in Evidence-Based Management. Mr. Mizzi has delivered talks and courses at the University of Malta, Mind Academy and Allied Health Directorate.

Mr. Mizzi has provided Speech and Language Pathology services within health centres, community clinics, mainstream schools, resource centres, elderly homes, and day centres. He has coordinated community-based SLP services and developed several quality measures for these services. Mr. Mizzi was appointed Lead (Professional Management) (2020) of the Speech and Language Pathology Services and reappointed in 2025.

## Ms. Samantha Zerafa

Manager Patient Support Services



Ms. Samantha Zerafa has over twenty years of experience in healthcare, with the past eleven years being dedicated specifically to Primary Health Care. She is passionate about providing accessible, patient-centred care. Samantha finds great fulfilment in primary care, where she engages with individuals from all walks of life and contributes to health solutions tailored to their unique lifestyles and needs. She is particularly committed to the advancement of telemedicine, recognizing its vital role in breaking down barriers and improving ease of access to healthcare for patients. Samantha is proud to work alongside a dedicated and compassionate team, whose support and collaboration continue to inspire and empower her work every day.

## Ms. Sylvia Camilleri

Practice Nurse, National Screening Centre  
M.Sc.in Science (Melit)  
B.Sc in Health Sciences (Melit)



Ms. Sylvia Camilleri is a highly experienced and dedicated nurse with a career spanning over 37 years. In the past 13 years, she has served at the National Screening Centre as Practice Nurse and leads the management of the colon screening program. Committed to health advocacy, Sylvia frequently takes part in television and radio programs to promote awareness about colon screening. She is co-founder of the Malta Colorectal Awareness Group, an initiative she launched in collaboration with a colon cancer survivor to further educate the public and support patients. In her professional commitment she has attended various conferences, locally and internationally, focusing on colon cancer screening and prevention. Sylvia enjoys travelling, reading, and taking walks in the countryside.

## Ms. Vanessa Bezzina

B.Sc. (Hons.), M.Sc. (LACIC, Sheffield)  
Allied Health Practitioner  
Speech-Language Pathologist



Vanessa Bezzina is a Speech and Language Pathologist who graduated in Communication Therapy from the University of Malta in 2013. She later obtained an MSc. in Language and Communication Impairments in Children from the University of Sheffield in 2018, with research on supporting bilingual and multilingual clients. Vanessa has delivered numerous talks and workshops for teachers, carers, and parents, with a focus on inclusive communication. She recently designed and led an innovative Keyword Signing in Early Childhood Education project within Primary Health Care, equipping early educators with tools and training to create accessible, communication-friendly environments for all children.





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