

Focus on primary prevention paves the way for a less unequal Europe in the new EU4Health programme

Health NGOs are key implementing partners to prepare European health systems to face future health threats

Brussels, 15th December: Primary prevention takes the place it deserves as at least 20 % of the total budget is reserved for health promotion and disease prevention to address health risks such as the harmful use of alcohol and tobacco.

EU health policy will now have the teeth it needs to make “Health in all Policies” a genuine cornerstone of the European Union, as the programme will be accompanied by the evaluation of the health impact of all European policies and actions, allowing public health a central role in addressing systemic issues facing our societies, including the need to consider planetary health and One Health.

EPHA strongly supports the way that the glue of this new EU4Health programme will make efforts to reduce the real health inequalities observed between and within the Member States themselves. The COVID-19 epidemic has exposed the massive disparities in social determinants of health faced by most of Europe’s population, including poor access to health care and structural inequalities that promote unhealthy living; and without addressing them, Europe’s healthy recovery is only a dream.

Key elements of the programme reflect long standing policy priorities of the public health community, for which EPHA together with its 81 members have been advocating for many years. The increased attention to primary prevention should translate into action especially by supporting public health policy development and evaluation, and building capacity of national health civil society.

EU Health policy has been never so close to the people of Europe: in the first time in history, the EU health programme recognises the role of associations and non-governmental organizations in a legally binding way, so that the lived experience and needs of the populations they represent will now have an obligation to be heard. The programme establishes a mandatory process to consult specialized associations and NGOs in the context of the development of annual work programmes and to present the results of these consultations to the European Parliament each year, echoing the joint demand of EPHA and other 25 European associations

which asked for an inclusive programme allowing meaningful involvement of public interest civil society, so that they could play a key role in determining its priorities and implementation.

EPHA Acting Secretary General Sascha Marschang said: “*The involvement of European Health NGOs is a key success factor for a robust systemic response to the pandemic recovery: our expertise emanating from our diverse organisational membership in Europe is essential support to prepare European health systems to face future health threats. EPHA and its member associations are ready to take this challenge and be implementing partners to achieve the goals of the EU4Health programme together.*”

Other elements of the programme also reflect EPHA and its members' priorities, including commitments to fight against chronic diseases, the creation of a European network of national cancer institutes, ensuring better availability of affordable medicines and medical devices or digitalisation of healthcare.

The programme also covers access to sexual and reproductive health care, clear references to the strengthening of mandates and resources the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the creation of a European Authority for the Response to Health Emergencies (HERA or European Barda), the coordination of tests resistance of national health systems, the development of quality health standards, the extension of European reference networks (ERNs) to complex or low-prevalence communicable and non-communicable diseases, and frequent references to a common assessment of health (ETS)

Next Steps

After the final approval of the Member States and the European Parliament, the EU4Health programme, with its 5,1billion euro budget, will set the path for EU health policy for the next 7 years. In wider terms, this is the first stepping stone to a more comprehensive and ambitious European Health Union, announced [by Commission President Ursula von den Leyen in her State of the Union Speech](#). The Future of Europe conference will play an important role in this process and EPHA together with its members and partners will continue to contribute as this continues to develop.

ENDS

Notes

[EU4Health: MEPs reach deal with Council on 2021-2027 EU health programme](#) - European Parliament Press Release
[Protecting people's health: the Council and the European Parliament agree provisionally on the EU4Health programme for 2021-2027](#) - Council of the EU Press Release

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