

Joint Letter to the Council of the European Union

EXTENDING THE MANDATE OF THE ECDC TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

Amending Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 establishing a European Centre for disease prevention and control (ECDC)

Brussels, 27 April 2021

To:

Ministers responsible for social affairs and health policy, part of the EPSCO Council
Health attachés, Member States' Permanent Representations to the EU

Dear Ministers,
Dear Advisors,

Health is a shared responsibility between Members States and the EU. For this shared action to work effectively:

- Public health needs to be seen as a common goal;
- Certain elements such as data collection and surveillance are best coordinated in a dedicated agency that will support and complement national-level actions and systems;
- Siloes need to be dismantled, both across medical disciplines and with regards to EU vs national efforts

If Europe is to focus on greater strategic autonomy and be a geopolitical force that remains the healthiest region of the world - yet burdened by large health inequalities, it needs an excellent Centre for preventing and controlling diseases, a more effective European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) that is all inclusive and that can collect and present information that is decisive for national health authorities, policymakers as well as healthcare professionals and the broader medical and scientific community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how interconnected disease areas are and how dismantling silos in healthcare leads to better results¹. The presence of clinical links between communicable and non-communicable diseases has been amplified by the crisis^{2,3} and implies that the optimal path to communicable disease control requires consideration of non-communicable diseases. However, they continue to be separated in epidemiology⁴. Such an approach hampers the efforts of national governments to provide effective and comprehensive public health responses. To truly safeguard the health of Europeans, there is a need for an integrated approach to health challenges and threats.

¹ Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in Health (EXPH). Opinion on the organisation of resilient health and social care following the COVID-19 pandemic. European Union, 2020. doi:10.2875/005848

² Horton, R. (2020). Offline: COVID-19 is not a pandemic. *The Lancet*, 396(10255), 874. doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(20)32000-6

³ Kluge H, Kremlin W, Rippin H, et al. Prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in the COVID-19 response. *The Lancet*. Published May 2020. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31067-9

⁴ Choi B, Morrison H, Yan Y-P, et al. Bringing chronic disease epidemiology and infectious disease epidemiology back together. *J Epidemiol Community Health*. 2007 Sep; 61(9): 802. doi: 10.1136/jech.2006.057752

The potential of increasing ECDC's scope of work to other areas of public health has been highlighted in the 2019 independent evaluation of the Centre^{5,6}. The European Parliament further asked in July 2020 that ECDC be empowered to tackle the gaps in chronic disease epidemiology⁷.

There is an urgency to bring disjointed data together, and the ECDC is seen as the most qualified body for this task. ECDC has the required expertise and capacity to coordinate and build on the work of large networks of public health bodies across Europe. The excellence of its scientific advice is internationally recognised and the effectiveness of its tools for collection, analysis and dissemination of data is proven – despite the gaps, limitations and challenges of financial and human resources brought to the light by the pandemic.

Extending the Centre's mandate and its capacity to operate is a necessity; and implementing a centralised mechanism is coherent with the wish to support data collection efforts in other areas and linking databases across sectors, to increase sustainability and efficiency of EU-level activities. This would support objectives on comparable data sharing on the European level, which would provide both health benefits and net economic gain.

Besides, such a mechanism can foster health promotion, while also improving population health through co-ordinated and scientifically informed disease prevention, helping to reduce susceptibility to future infectious outbreaks⁸ and other health threats.

The below signatories herewith call on the Council to consider the expansion of the mandate of the ECDC to other areas of public health that are linked to the current mission of the Centre (notably to cover the interconnections between communicable and non-communicable diseases) as a response to the learnings of the COVID-19 pandemic; and as a forward-looking and sustainable approach to improving public health in Europe that enhances multidisciplinary collaboration.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories:

BioMed Alliance



European Health Union Initiative



European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA)



EuroHealthNet



⁵ Third independent external evaluation of the ECDC in accordance with its Founding Regulation. Final Report by PWC. September 2019. Available at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/third-independent-external-evaluation-of-ECDC-report.pdf>

⁶ Minutes of the Forty-sixth Meeting Stockholm, 18-19 June 2019. ECDC Management Board. Available at: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/minutes-forty-sixth-management-board-meeting.pdf>

⁷ European Parliament resolution of 10 July 2020 on the EU's public health strategy postCOVID-19 (2020/2691(RSP)). Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0205_EN.pdf

⁸ Kostova D, Husain MJ, Sugerman D, Hong Y, Saraiya M, Keltz J, Asma S. Synergies between Communicable and Noncommunicable Disease Programs to Enhance Global Health Security. *Emerg Infect Dis*. 2017 Dec;23(13):S40–6. doi: 10.3201/eid2313.170581. PMID: 29155655; PMCID: PMC5711304.

EU4Health Civil Society Alliance



European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)



Self Care In Europe (SCiE)



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EU Health Coalition



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European Diabetes Forum (EUDF)



European
Diabetes Forum

Senior International Health Association (SIHA)



Senior International Health Association