

HEALTH4EUROPE

A blueprint for Europe's next Health Programme

Contributing to a Stronger European Health Union in the next Multiannual Financial Framework

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The Health4Europe Programme proposal of the [EU4Health Civil Society Alliance](#) supports the European Commission's ambition to strengthen the European Health Union and deliver on the objectives set out in [the Political Guidelines 2024–2029](#), the [Mission Letter to the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare](#) and the [Mission Letter to the Commissioner- for Preparedness and Crisis Management](#) and the EU's landmark [Roadmap for Women's Rights](#).

This proposal addresses systemic health challenges through a strategic focus on prevention, resilience, digital transformation, equitable access, and civil society engagement. Health is a fundamental right enshrined in the EU Treaties¹, a core pillar of the European Pillar of Social Rights², and a forward-looking commitment under Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Good health and well-being³.

Recognising that investments in health generate economic, social, and democratic returns⁴, the Health Programme defines priorities to channel EU funding towards measurable impact, cohesion, and innovation initiatives, in synergy with the Commission's efforts to increase Europe's competitiveness. Without a healthy Europe, the European Union cannot be competitive, productive and resilient.

Regulation (EU) 2021/522 setting out the EU4Health Programme, supported the following overarching objectives:

- Improve and foster health in the Union,
- Protect people in the Union from serious cross-border threats to health,
- Improve access to medicinal products, medical devices, and crisis-relevant products,
- Strengthen health systems and the healthcare workforce.

The current Programme emphasises resilience, digital transformation, disease prevention, and health equity, while also enhancing the Union's capacity to respond to emerging health threats.

¹ Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Article 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

² Principle 16 of the European Pillar of Social Rights

³ SDG 3 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda

⁴ [EU4Health Programme Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#)

THE EU4HEALTH CIVIL SOCIETY ALLIANCE PROPOSAL

This proposal for a future **Health Programme**, titled **Health4Europe**, emphasises the importance of continued investment in health in reinforcing the EU's ability to withstand future economic, climate and environmental, geopolitical, technological, and workforce challenges. It is based on the premise that strong public health systems safeguard the European society's ability to sustain economic growth⁵. It also builds on the premise that by protecting and growing its human capital, one of its global strengths, the EU will be better equipped to withstand an uncertain or hostile global economic climate. Since the pandemic, there has been an increasing number of frequent crises, leading to geopolitical fracture, uncertainty and war, which demand even stronger collective efforts to protect and promote universal access to health across Member States.

The Health Programme is not the only such tool available to the EU. The European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the Erasmus Programme, the Horizon Europe programme also contribute to better health outcomes - whether by supporting social inclusion, research & innovation, improving living conditions, or promoting health education and mobility - but a standalone Health Programme is the only tool that places *all* citizens' health first.

In this proposal, we:

- Introduce a newer, broader geopolitical and competitiveness angle that was not explicit in the EU4Health Programme;
- Bring cross-sectoral prevention into implementation focus;
- Ensure the necessary instruments are available to meet the goals under the Roadmap for Women's Rights;
- Put environmental health threats and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) into the resilience pillar strengthening the One Health approach more explicitly;
- Move beyond civil society organisations (CSOs) consultation to institutionalised participatory governance in health.

On this basis, below are the proposed priorities for the **Health4Europe programme**.

1. OBJECTIVES

The EU4Health Work Programme is a cornerstone of a resilient, fair, and future-ready European Health Union. Through its focus on prevention, preparedness, innovation, and inclusion, it delivers on the EU's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of all Europeans.

General Objectives

⁵ [Return on investment of public health interventions: a systematic review. Rebecca Masters, Elspeth Anwar, Brendan Collins, Richard Cookson, Simon Capewell. Correspondence to Rebecca Masters, North Wales Local Public Health Team, Public Health Wales, Mold, Flintshire CH7 1PZ, UK](#)

The Programme shall have a Union added value and complement the policies of the Member States with the aim of promoting a high level of human health, reducing health inequalities, and fostering equitable, accessible and sustainable health systems across the Union. It shall pursue the following general objectives, in line with the principles of health equity, social justice, and universal health coverage:

- (a) Strengthening public health systems and resilience across Member States, with emphasis on continuity of care, preparedness for emerging and continuing health threats, and addressing healthcare workforce shortages;
- (b) Advancing health equity by reducing socio-economic and geographic disparities in access to quality healthcare, with a focus on vulnerable and underserved populations;
- (c) Supporting and complementing health action by the Member States regarding women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- (d) Promoting disease prevention and healthy lifestyles by addressing both risk factors such as diet, smoking and physical activity as well as the commercial determinants of health and fostering healthy environments;
- (e) Supporting the digital transformation of health systems, including investment in secure and interoperable infrastructures and improving digital health literacy;
- (f) Enhancing civic participation and democratic governance in health by supporting the role and sustainability of civil society in EU health policymaking.
- (g) Supporting civil society organisations working to advance health protection across the EU, with a particular emphasis on organisations supporting access to services for marginalised communities.

2. CROSS-CUTTING ENABLING POLICIES

2.1 Measures to strengthen health systems and workforce resilience

- Support Member States in tackling healthcare workforce shortages, currently estimated at 1.2 million across the EU, through actions on education, retention, and wellbeing of health professionals.
- Promote person-centred, integrated care models that incorporate holistic, digital and cross-border approaches.
- Promote cross-sectoral preparedness using the One Health approach, addressing antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and environmental health threats.

2.2 Enable an effective patient-driven digital health transformation

- Harmonised implementation of the European Health Data Space (EHDS) across all Member States.

- Scale up of digital health infrastructures across Member States.
- Accelerate the deployment and responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered tools in public health, policymaking, research, diagnostics, and care pathways.
- Embed human oversight, patient engagement, and ethical safeguards in all digital health deployment.
- Support digital health literacy programmes targeting professionals, patients, families, caregivers and the general public.
- Ensure equal access to digital and AI-powered health tools to all European citizens

2.3 Prevention via Health in All Policies

- Facilitate the participation and input of both Member State Health experts and CSOs in co-creating policies to serve prevention in policy fields relating to risk factors (e.g. agri-food, environment, chemicals, transport etc.)

2.4 Improve women's health

- Improve patients' informed decision-making through increased access to evidence-based information on all aspects of women's health.
- Support Member States in eradicating discrimination and harmful practices in sexual and reproductive health care settings through actions on training for health professionals and the development of clear guidelines on standards of care.
- Adopt gender-sensitive approaches to crisis preparedness efforts.

2.5 Health democracy and civil society engagement

- Establish structured dialogue mechanisms with CSOs to strengthen participatory governance in the EU Health Programme.
- Improve access to funding for CSOs through reduced co-financing rates, simplified application procedures, multi-annual grant procedures, and increased transparency.
- Promote civic dialogue, stakeholder representation in health policy forums and involve CSOs in consultation, co-creation and co-decision processes.

3. POLICY INITIATIVES TO ADVANCE THE HEALTH UNION

3.1 Prevention and management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

- Implement proven policies to eliminate the harmful impact of commercial determinants of health by tackling tobacco and emerging nicotine products, alcohol, poor diets, and sedentary behaviour, particularly among youth.

- Ensure further implementation of the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan while addressing existing gaps, and expand its successful models to other NCDs, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, neurodegenerative diseases, autism, and mental ill-health.
- Adopt a robust women's health strategy delivering on the vision set out in the Roadmap for Women's Rights outlining targeted actions to improve women's health outcomes, including sexual and reproductive health, across member states.
- Support Member States in implementing and monitoring legislation, including exchange and support to the scale-up of best practices, taking into account implementation of WHO guidelines.

3.2 Crisis preparedness and strategic autonomy of EU healthcare systems

- Implement and review the Critical Medicines Act to address dependencies and secure supply chains, in order to ensure equitable access to critical medicines in times of crisis.
- Invest in the creation of strategic stockpiles and inventories of key products and devices.
- Implement an EU-wide action plan on hospital cybersecurity in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
- Expand the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control's mandate to support the coordination of preparedness, surveillance and response in the Member States.

3.3 Ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare and medical products

- Support initiatives addressing healthcare inequalities and supporting cross-border access to health care.
- Promote regional and European cooperation on joint procurement and pricing of critical medicines.
- Implement and strengthen EU coordination of health technology assessment (HTA), and improve equitable access to safe, effective, and innovative medical products that address unmet health needs.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

The Health4Europe programme will prioritise transnational projects led by experienced and impact-driven consortia. Funding priorities include:

- Prevention and early detection programmes.
- Digital health infrastructure and literacy.
- Improve women's health.

- Health workforce strengthening and skills development.
- Capacity building for EU policy implementation at EU and national level with consideration for the added value of EU-coordinated action alongside individual Member State efforts.
- Ensure the long-term sustainability and upscaling of existing EU platforms and networks to facilitate healthcare, including the European Reference Networks and other mechanisms established under the Cross Border Healthcare Directive, to strengthen NCD control across Europe.
- Institutionalise civil society organisations' participation in health policies.

To ensure efficient absorption and high impact:

- Simplify application and reporting requirements: More predictability allowing for better planning, longer timelines leading to stronger applications in particular when large cross-country consortia must be set up.
- Ensure consistency and transparency in eligibility criteria: Restrictive or retroactive eligibility criteria prevent some stakeholders from applying, which compromises the programme's ability to achieve its objectives.
- Strategic communication efforts will broaden awareness and participation: Awareness-raising campaigns around the programme and calls for proposals to reach a wider audience.

5. GOVERNANCE

To ensure transparency, coherence, and effectiveness in the implementation, a robust governance structure must be established. This governance shall mirror the participatory, structured approach outlined in the EU4Health Programme.

A Health Programme Steering Group will be set up, composed of representatives from the European Commission and all Member States, each designating one member and an alternate. The Steering Group will serve as the central forum for:

- Consultation on the strategic orientations and priorities of the annual work programmes.
- Alignment between the programme's objectives and the Member States' health policies.
- Monitoring the programme's implementation and recommending necessary adjustments.

In addition, structured and informed dialogue with civil society organisations will be institutionalised. Civil society has proven critical in the effective implementation and absorption of EU health funds. Therefore, annual consultations with relevant stakeholders,

including patient groups, healthcare professional organisations, and public health CSOs, shall be organised, providing vital feedback on priorities, challenges, and results.

The Commission will report annually to the European Parliament on the outcomes of the Steering Group meetings and stakeholder consultations, ensuring democratic accountability and continuous improvement.

6. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND CONTROL MECHANISMS

A comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and control system is indispensable to ensure that the future health programme delivers its intended impact, optimises resource use, and strengthens public trust.

Monitoring

Progress will be tracked through a performance framework aligned with specific, measurable indicators. These will build upon those used in EU4Health, including metrics such as:

- Access to essential healthcare services,
- Reduction of health inequalities,
- Vaccination coverage rates,
- Effective absorption and use of health programme funds .

Evaluation

An interim evaluation of the programme will be conducted to allow for timely adjustments based on evidence and lessons learned. A final evaluation will follow no later than four years after the programme's closure, assessing its effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance, and EU added value.

Both evaluations will involve independent experts and consultation with civil society, and their findings will be published and transmitted to the European Parliament, Council, and relevant EU committees .

Control

Financial management will adhere to the principles of sound financial management and protection of the Union's financial interests. Mechanisms will be in place for:

- Audits of grants and procurements,
- On-the-spot checks by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF),
- Cooperation with the European Court of Auditors.

1. European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
2. European Patients' Forum (EPF)
3. Alzheimer Europe
4. EURORDIS Rare Diseases Europe
5. European Public Health Association (EUPHA)
6. AIDS Action Europe
7. Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)
8. Association of European Coeliac Societies (AOECS)
9. Center for Reproductive Rights
10. Childhood Cancer International
11. Correlation - European Harm Reduction Network (C-EHRN)
12. Digestive Cancers Europe
13. EUROCAM
14. EuroHealthNet
15. European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG)
16. European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare)
17. European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC)
18. European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC)
19. European Central Council of Homeopaths (ECCH)
20. European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA)
21. European Federation of Allergy (EFA)
22. European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA)
23. European Heart Network (EHN)
24. European Health Management Association (EHMA)
25. European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA)
26. European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA)
27. European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)
28. European Respiratory Society (ERS)
29. Fertility Europe
30. Health Action International (HAI)
31. Infectious Disease Alliance (IDA)
32. International Diabetes Federation (Europe)
33. International Federation of Anthroposophical Medical Associations (IVAA)
34. International Sport and Culture Association
35. Mental Health Europe (MHE)
36. Psychedelic Access and Research European Alliance (PAREA)
37. Salud por Derecho
38. SIOPE – European Society for Paediatric Oncology
39. Smoke Free Partnership
40. TB Europe Coalition (TBEC)
41. Wemos

EU4health

Civil Society Alliance



