



STRENGTHENING THE EU'S COMPETITIVENESS IN HEALTH REQUIRES AN INCREASED INVESTMENT IN THE WORKFORCE AND GOVERNANCE

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EUPHA and EHMA welcome the study on 'EU's Path to Competitiveness: How Digital, Energy and Health can lead the Way Forward' (I-Com), presented in a digital symposium on 11 January 2022 by the Institute of Competitiveness. However, for these initiatives to succeed an increased investment in the workforce and governance of public health and health systems will be needed.

The I-Com study addresses the European public health responses to the coronavirus pandemic, analyses the main steps that have been taken towards the creation of the European Health Union and its current update. It has a particular focus on the pharmaceutical strategy for Europe; crisis preparedness and response measures; and the European plan to beat cancer. It states that the EU health data space is an enabling factor for the creation of a stronger EU Health Union.

EUPHA and EHMA acknowledge that building the European Health Union can be the main path for strengthening the EU's competitiveness as it will increase innovation in the areas of unmet needs and pave the way for the EU to lead the forthcoming data-driven society. The European response to the COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrated that collaboration between countries is key and that further collaboration is required to face current and future challenges. Building the European Health Union also remains an aim of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

Towards building the European Health Union, the tasks of the European Centre for Disease Control and the European Medicines Agency have been further developed, and the EU has announced that a new agency – the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) – will be established to support the response capacity to trans-national health emergencies.

EUPHA and EHMA welcome these developments but would like to highlight the following points that need to be taken into account.

1. A healthy and empowered health workforce

The European Health Union can only be effective if the health workforce is protected, valued at its real value, trained and re-trained. The health workforce should play a key role in developing new legislation to support the preparedness of health systems.

2. Not just for but with European citizens

Patient empowerment and health literacy are essential to the European Health Union. The patient/citizen needs to be an active partner and be involved in the decision-making process. Only then can the European Health Union be successful. Special emphasis should be put on emergency preparedness, telemedicine and self-monitoring.

3. Resilient and flexible health systems

Health systems need to be resilient and flexible to be able to transcend after a shock and unceasing evolution. This includes investing in health systems, both at the financial as well as the workforce level. Primary healthcare should be the backbone of the health care system and integration of services and interoperability of systems (e.g. health and social care) should be actively supported.

4. Recognition for social disparities

In this time of building back the health system, it is essential that we build back fairer, taking into account the social disparities already existing in society and even amplified in times of COVID-19. A **multisector** health promotion and protection approach is central in every health system.

5. Invest in governance

Investing in governance is key to a well-functioning health system. Direct financial incentives towards supporting actions that increase workability, focus on prevention and allow for spare capacity in human resources in health systems. We need to increase investments in **public health governance**. In many Member States, public health institutes are underfinanced, negatively affecting efficiency on all levels as well as adversely impacting population health.

The need to support innovation, improve health governance in the Pan-European region, and create an enabling environment to promote investment in health was also highlighted in the report of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development published in September 2021.¹

¹ Forman, R., Azzopardi-Muscat, N., Kirkby, V., Lessof, S., Nathan, N. L., Pastorino, G., ... & Mossialos, E. (2021). Drawing light from the pandemic: Rethinking strategies for health policy and beyond. *Health Policy*.

THE SIGNATORIES

The **European Health Management Association (EHMA)** is a non-profit membership organisation that focuses on enhancing the capacity and capability of health management to deliver high-quality healthcare. Our vision is to support the spread of knowledge on excellence in health management at all levels: systemic, organisational and individual. In doing so we strive to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of health systems and services, and the well-being of Europe's citizens and communities. EHMA operates at an international, European and national level, with a Membership of over 50 organisations and 30+ individuals and a broader network in excess of 1,000 key stakeholders ranging from managers, educators, professionals and more. EHMA's activities revolve around three key workstreams: membership-focused actions and network engagement; research and EU project work focused on dissemination and stakeholder engagement; and events and workshops, such as our EHMA Annual Conference.

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The **European Public Health Association, or EUPHA** in short, is an umbrella organisation for public health associations in Europe. Our network of national associations of public health represents around 25,000 public health professionals. Our mission is to facilitate and activate a strong voice of the public health network by enhancing the visibility of the evidence and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals. EUPHA contributes to the preservation and improvement of public health in the European region through capacity and knowledge building. We are committed to creating a more inclusive Europe, narrowing all health inequalities among Europeans, by facilitating, activating, and disseminating strong evidence-based voices from the public health community and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals to achieve evidence-based change.

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