



Health is wealth: policy makers must preserve investment to protect the health of EU citizens

A broad range of health stakeholders jointly call on policy makers to preserve funding for key health policy and research funding instruments, such as EU4Health and the Health Cluster in Horizon Europe.

The future health of EU citizens may be at risk, as policy makers are likely to consider cutting the budget of key EU health policy and funding instruments, that together have an impressive track record of generating important new insights on human health and better outcomes for European patients. The health community, healthcare professional societies, patient organisations, and other civil society organisations, has come together to call on EU policy makers to prioritise stronger health funding in the next Multiannual Financial Framework and to prioritise health initiatives in EU policy making. A shifting prioritisation towards funding for Defence or AI, evidenced by very limited mention of health in the current public consultations¹, should not come at the expense of the health of European citizens. **A strong and coordinated European health strategy is essential to enhance well-being of citizens, resilience of the health workforce, long-term sustainability of health systems and innovation and European competitiveness in the health field.**

It seems that the **lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic are already starting to fade from our collective memory**. The public health emergency that led to over 2 million deaths in the European region², demonstrated that health threats do not stop at borders and that a coordinated European approach and strong and sustained investment in health research do save lives. While the immediate crisis seems to have passed, we must continue to see health as a priority, in order to enhance resilience against current and emerging health threats such as antimicrobial resistance and potential future pandemics. At the same time, we should not restrict health funding to emergency preparedness, as different health problems are often interconnected. For instance, co-morbidities played an important role on the severity of COVID-infections in patients with underlying health problems³. Health should also be connected to other factors such as the environment, for example the UK National Health Service has recently saved around £30,000 (€35700) each month in Bradford by creating a Clean Air Zone, which has resulted in around 700 fewer GP visits for breathing and heart problems each month, after only 1 year⁴.

EU health initiatives such as the **EU4Health programme, Digital Europe and Horizon Europe** are playing a crucial role in strengthening health systems, driving medical innovation, and improving access to care. EU4Health, the largest EU health programme to date, has provided critical funding to enhance crisis response, support digital transformation in healthcare, and improve access to medicines and medical devices across Member States. Meanwhile, Digital Europe has contributed to the deployment of digital technologies and the health cluster in Horizon Europe has significantly

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14520-EU-s-next-long-term-budget-MFF-implementing-EU-funding-with-Member-States-and-regions_en

² See WHO: <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>

³ See Russel, Lone and Baillie in Nature <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-022-02156-9>

⁴ <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/story/bradford-breathes-easier-pollution-levels-fall#:~:text=Their%20latest%20results%2C%20which%20are,around%20%C2%A330%2C000%20each%20month.>



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contributed to advancing biomedical research and innovation, the development of new medicines and treatments and the redesign of care processes enabled by digital technologies. It is essential that funding for these important initiatives be consolidated and strengthened, instead of reduced, with the risk of losing the benefits of the last funding period. Investing in health will offer ample return on investment: studies in the UK found that for every £1 of public money invested in medical research, around 25 pence in health gains and GDP benefits is received back every year⁵. Funding also fosters innovation and would therefore support the Commission's objective to strengthen European economic competitiveness.

The EU cannot afford to weaken its commitment to health, policy makers must continue to keep health at the forefront. Failing to do so will not only risk the lives of people but will cause medical advancements and research to move elsewhere, leaving the EU lagging behind in the race for innovation and impacting overall competitiveness.

Signatories:

The BioMed Alliance and its member organisations:



⁵ See Kings College: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/health-research-offers-a-big-return-on-investment>



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Other civil society organisations from the health field:

