

EuroHealthNet

Evaluation Report (2015)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. Introduction

EuroHealthNet appointed PHAST in November 2014 to undertake an independent evaluation and impact assessment of their programmes, activities and the organisation as a whole over a four year period (2014 - 2017). The first year of the evaluation focussed on the development of the plan. Following a series of interviews with a group of key respondents a plan was approved by EuroHealthNet's Executive Board in April 2015.

EuroHealthNet is supported by a core fund granted by the European Commission, administered by DG Employment and Social Affairs (DG EMPL) through the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI).

This summary provides an overview of what has emerged from the evaluation in 2015 with 'areas for consideration'. These are not 'recommendations' as such, but issues for the Executive Board to discuss and decide on how they wish to proceed. The evaluation process is underpinned by an action-research approach to maintain a high degree of flexibility to enable the Executive Board to decide their priorities for subsequent phases. Proposals for the next phase of the evaluation are also included.

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation identified several broad questions to be addressed which relate to EuroHealthNet's ability to champion health and address social determinants of health in Europe; how partnerships have been strengthened to advance the European health and social determinants of health agenda; whether participation of member state health agencies and institutes in the European Semester process and SIP has increased; the involvement of stakeholders in programmes and initiatives undertaken by EuroHealthNet; whether capacity building and training provided by EuroHealthNet has resulted in improved operations at regional and national level for achieving health equity and to explore whether any lessons can be learned to guide future EuroHealthNet policies, initiatives and strategy in the coming years.

Process

In 2014 EuroHealthNet implemented a new governance framework for the EuroHealthNet Partnership which included three 'pillars':

- Health Promotion Europe (HPE)
- The European Platform for Health and Social Equity (PHASE)
- The European Centre for Innovation, Research and Implementation for Health & Wellbeing (CIRI)

For 2015 the evaluation included several components which sought to gather views from the diversity of members and partners associated with EuroHealthNet.

- Conversations with participants at EuroHealthNet's Annual General Meeting (2- 4 June 2015): 22 *ad hoc* conversations took place to identify the benefits of their association with the network.
- HPE survey: 50% of the membership was contacted. 7 of the 13 questionnaires sent were returned.
- CIRI: 3 new partners were invited to be interviewed. All three agreed.
- Key respondents: A group of individuals were identified who could provide perspectives across the range of EuroHealthNet's work. 7 were invited, 5 agreed to be interviewed.
- Two officials from DG SANTE and DG EMPL of the European Commission were contacted, but declined to participate in the evaluation.
- Partnerships: 2 networks with which EuroHealthNet established partnerships in 2014 were sent questionnaires. Only one replied.



2. Emergent Themes

Governance and membership

Overall, respondents welcome the new structure which has enabled a wider range of organisations to join the network without losing EuroHealthNet's distinctive focus on addressing health inequalities and promoting health and social equity.

Members of HPE and partners of CIRI and PHASE affirmed the value of the separate routes to join the network and the flexible fee structure. Most interviewees referred to themselves as 'members' of EuroHealthNet, irrespective of their relationship to the network.

The creation of the new Technical Working Groups (TWIGS) is regarded as an innovative approach that has the potential to strengthen 'horizontal' links between organisations within the network and provide a 'vertical link' to the Executive Board.

Respondents value the approachability of staff within the EuroHealthNet Office which acts both as a hub and a facilitator for networking within EuroHealthNet and externally with other organisations.

Involvement in the network

Members and partners of EuroHealthNet appreciate the opportunities to become involved in the network, referring to their participation in meetings and study visits and collaborating in bids for EU funding and projects. They also value sharing their knowledge, skills, perspectives and examples from their practice.

The TWIGS are identified as a creative and relevant way to exchange expertise and experience for mutual benefit to inform and enhance the work of individual organisations while contributing to discussions of issues with implications across the EU. The range of topics of the TWIGS offer members/partners the opportunity to select those most relevant to their work and involve their staff.

Forming partnerships

Interviewees interpreted the development of partnerships in a variety of ways, partnerships between members of EuroHealthNet, partnerships between EuroHealthNet and other networks and between national organisations that share a common interest.

EuroHealthNet is regarded as an important source of knowledge of potential contacts for members to find partners in other member states with which to collaborate. The study visits enable members to learn about projects in other countries and connect with people with whom new partnerships can be developed. The opportunity to collaborate with organisations from other EU countries to develop bids for funding and implement projects is particularly valued.

Identity and visibility

Respondents see EuroHealthNet as an important organisation that champions the development of policies and programmes to address health and social inequalities across the EU. Its presence at meetings, conferences and other events at a European level give visibility to these issues and enhances the morale of those who feel isolated in their own countries.

The need to maintain and enhance EuroHealthNet's profile in Europe and within member states was stressed. It was suggested that EuroHealthNet should invest more in promoting its 'brand', especially among ministries in member states. Enhancing its profile is seen to be key to its long-term survival and success.



Keeping inequalities on the agenda

EuroHealthNet is recognised as playing a crucial role in keeping health inequalities on the agenda at the European level and with member states, but that the issue needs to be elevated higher up the political agenda. Members see EuroHealthNet as their collective voice at the European table, providing a channel through which members can promote issues of national concern and those that require a pan-European response.

New ways need to be developed to capture the attention of officials and politicians to make health inequalities a higher priority. This will require ingenuity to stimulate interest, encourage participation and attract commitment.

It was suggested that EuroHealthNet could be a helpful catalyst to facilitate discussions within member states to translate the broad recommendations from EU funded projects to be more country specific and develop more concrete outcomes on issues.

One idea proposed was to work with Members of the European Parliament to develop an 'Interest Group' to focus on addressing health inequalities and promote health equity. Such a group could encourage debate and formulate propositions.

Impact - making a difference

A significant aspect of the impact of EuroHealthNet's work is the difference it makes to member organisations. Participants at EuroHealthNet's General Meeting identified a range of benefits that derive from their association with the network. From the other components of the evaluation it is evident that involvement in the network and participation in a range of its activities enable member organisations to influence the process of policy making and programme development at local, regional and national levels.

Respondents highlighted a number of ways in which EuroHealthNet has an impact on the work of their organisations and enhances their influence. The following themes are elaborated in the main report:

- Providing information and advice
- Facilitating international collaboration
- Co-ordinating bids for EU-funded projects
- Raising the profile of organisations
- Enhancing effectiveness
- Support to influence the development of national policies

Challenges

Interviewees were asked what they thought would be the most significant challenges facing EuroHealthNet in the coming year(s). Some echoed those raised at the General Meeting in June 2015:

- Securing funding through continuing to increase and broaden EuroHealthNet's membership while maintaining its distinct identity.
- The EU's new economic policy will require a fresh and innovative approach to keep health and social inequalities on the EU's agenda and raise its status.
- It is important that that senior policy makers are encouraged to attend meetings co-ordinated by EuroHealthNet.



Expectations by 2017

HPE members were asked what they hoped their association with EuroHealthNet would help them achieve by the end of 2017. Their expectations appeared to be within EuroHealthNet's capacity to support:

- Enhance collaboration to fulfil EuroHealthNet's mission and the goals of HPE members.
- Continue to update members on developments of European public health.
- Promote country-specific issues related to health inequalities at the EU level.
- Active involvement in the TWIGS to enhance international collaboration.
- Support to engage in EU projects to further work on health inequalities.
- Develop and expand the HPE members' partnership.
- Organise webinars where EuroHealthNet has expertise.
- Support for the European Public Health Conference in Stockholm 2017.

Identifying evidence of impact

Interviewees were asked for their views on what would be reasonable evidence to demonstrate EuroHealthNet's impact. This was seen to be a challenging issue. Comments included: the value of focussing less on structural measures and more on smaller scale and people-oriented measures; identifying where EuroHealthNet's recommendations have been accepted by the EU and EC; tracking references to EuroHealthNet and its reports in publications of members of the network, national ministries, the EU and other stakeholders; recording the development of the TWIGS.

Additional ideas

One respondent suggested that EuroHealthNet could develop an exchange programme for young public health officials to enhance their understanding of how different member states approach the challenges of addressing health and social inequalities.

3. Areas for Consideration

Themes arising from the analysis of views expressed in the components of the evaluation indicate areas that the Executive Board may wish to consider exploring further:

Governance and membership

- Invite those who attend EuroHealthNet's General Meeting to consider themselves as 'delegates' from their member/partner organisation.
- Contact member/partner organisations before EuroHealthNet's General Meeting to encourage them to brief their delegate to represent the organisation's views at the meeting.
- Grow the TWIGS before developing other initiatives to strengthen links between members.
- Actively promote the network to expand and broaden the membership base.



Identity, visibility and 'brand'

- Consider how EuroHealthNet's profile could be elevated with ministries across Europe by taking a more proactive approach to promoting its 'brand'.
- Prepare a development strategy and identify individuals within the network who could take on the role of visiting ministries to promote the role and goals of EuroHealthNet.
- Consult a professional communications organisation as to how to promote the 'brand' of EuroHealthNet more effectively.

Championing health equity

- Explore ways to re-present and promote action to tackle health inequalities and promote health equity to stimulate interest and attract commitment from decision-makers at the EU level.
- Translate general recommendations of project reports to be more country-specific and offer to facilitate discussions between organisations within member states to generate concrete outcomes.
- Work with Members of the European Parliament to establish an 'Interest Group' to bring attention to health equity.

Partnership working

- Identify criteria to decide the basis to establish a partnership with another European-wide network.
- Agree mutual expectations of the partnership including shared activities for each year and ensure equity of effort and investment of time and resources.
- Consider the creation of a TWIG that reflects the shared concern of a partnership to facilitate the involvement of members of both networks.

Capacity Building

- Make explicit the fact that in addition to formal training events, participation in the range of activities organised by EuroHealthNet can enhance the capacity of member organisations.
- Consider the proposal to create an exchange programme for young professionals in public health organisations to learn how different countries in the EU address health and social inequalities.

Engaging stakeholders

- Develop an explicit strategy that identifies and priorities the individuals, organisations and structures it wishes to influence in pursuit of its core aims.
- Target senior officials in relevant ministries to promote EuroHealthNet's 'brand'.
- Consider contacting senior members in each member/partner organisation each year to discuss the organisation's relationship with EuroHealthNet and enhance involvement in the network.



4. Progressing the Evaluation

Following the conclusion of first phase of the evaluation, the Executive Board is invited to consider the components proposed for the second phase for 2016:

- *Following up new members:* Interview a sample of new PHASE partners.
- *Consulting the readers of Health Highlights:* Survey to discover EuroHealthNet's reach and impact.
- *Tracking references to EuroHealthNet* by member organisations and others.
- *Survey study visits in 2014 and 2015:* To discover how participants applied what they learned.
- *Key respondents:* Interview a group of members/partners on their perspectives on EuroHealthNet.
- *HPE survey:* Survey of HPE members who were not contacted in 2015.
- *Case studies:* Follow up a small sample of new members/partners who have already been interviewed to explore how their relationship with EuroHealthNet evolves.
- *Impact on member organisations:* To discover how a sample of members/partners judge their success and how their association with EuroHealthNet has contributed to this and how.
- *Other stakeholders:* Seek the views of people that EuroHealthNet would wish to influence who are outside the formal membership.

5. Conclusion

It is evident that EuroHealthNet's new governance framework has been well received by members and partners. The network is well regarded as an organisation that champions the development of policies and programmes to address health inequalities in Europe. EuroHealthNet's success in developing partnerships to advance health and the social determinants of health agenda requires further exploration. Members and partners value highly their association with EuroHealthNet and the opportunities this offers to share knowledge and practice between organisations in different member states.

Participation in a range of activities co-ordinated by EuroHealthNet has a significant impact on capacity building in organisations, with the impact of elevating their profile and status within their member states. There would be value in investing time and effort to promote EuroHealthNet's brand and build stronger links with ministries across EU member states. There could be value in discovering the views of a wider group of stakeholders (in addition to members/partners) on the work and impact of EuroHealthNet.

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