



Written Statement by EuroHealthNet for the 70th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, Provisional Agenda item: The European Programme of Work (2020–2025) – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”

European Programme of Work for improved health for all

EuroHealthNet welcomes the draft WHO European Programme of Work (EPW) 2020-2025. The emphasis it gives to the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’ is excellent. Our response focuses on three topics.

- (1) Addressing health inequalities;
- (2) The transition to sustainable health systems which are better connected to the factors which influence health outcomes;
- (3) Investing in the social side of health crisis preparedness.

Progress on improving life expectancy and other objective measures of health outcomes have started faltering, even reversing in some cases. Health inequalities were already rising before the COVID-19 pandemic. We need a committed approach at all levels, including political levels, to address health and wellbeing for population groups that experience vulnerability. The concept of vulnerability needs redefining to catch up with changing socio-economic realities. As a partnership of bodies responsible for public health and concerned about growing levels of health inequalities, we need the support from the EPW to encourage ambitious action for health equity and on the related Social, Economic, and Environmental Determinants of health (SEEDs).

All mechanisms should champion the importance of strengthening health promotion, preventative services, and other public health measures. We need to transform struggling curative systems into health promoting services, which are proactive in meeting emerging challenges and resilient to shocks and crises. Health promotion principles are closely related to behavioural sciences and to embedding healthier choices into health strategies, as also outlined in one of the EPW flagship initiatives. But for many people personal choices are a luxury. We need to create equitable opportunities and enhance the capability of all people and communities to improve health outcomes. The commercial determinants of health which have a harmful influence on behaviours and underlying determinants should also be carefully addressed.

During the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen a huge mobilisation for funds toward containment and crisis preparedness. This has mainly directed towards health **care** services and the economy.



There is a need to address the acute needs of health professionals and boost hospital capacity. At the same time, financing crisis containment and preparedness through a psycho-social approach that promotes resilience, community and integrated social support have been considered to a lesser extent. This approach should be balanced against reinforcing a pre-dominant bio-medical approach to health.

We need to build new and better bridges between public health and primary health care, and between the health sector (including mental health), the social sector, and the economy at his whole. We need to incorporate health equity impact assessments in recovery mechanisms and seek to cushion the health impacts of economic and labour market shocks. We need integrated and coordinated cross-cutting political action guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Health-in-all-Policies-strategy, and the overarching goal of reducing health inequalities¹. Improvements are needed in public health workforce competences with regards to skills for health promotion, disease prevention, cross-sector task-shifting, and in digital health literacy. New financing mechanisms must be explored in order to scale up public health work. We are keen to contribute to this area of impact investments through our e-guide on Financing Health-Promoting Services.

If implemented in accordance with its vision, the Programme can help to address the needs of people along social gradients in the context of fair distribution of assets, power, and resources. We welcome the EPW's reinforced emphasis on leadership and utilising capabilities of national health authorities – via strategic guidance from WHO Europe in collaboration with relevant international institutions, including at EU level. EuroHealthNet has worked and grown in exactly these fields for over two decades so is ready, willing, and able to help delivery of the EPW to meet these objectives.

EuroHealthNet, Brussels, 04 September 2020

¹ Siegrist J, Mekel O et al. (2020). *Integrated health policy recommendations – Justifying health policy recommendations to mitigate indirect health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic within public health actions*. Bremen: Competence Network Public Health COVID-19, Germany [online] Available at: https://www.public-health-covid19.de/images/2020/Ergebnisse/Mitigation_englisch_2872020_FINAL.pdf