



Statement on '*Can people afford to pay for health care? New evidence on financial protection in Europe*' (Item 5.d) at the 68th session of WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Rome, September 2018

EuroHealthNet, the European Partnership for improving health equity and wellbeing, which consists of National Public Health Institutes and Regional Health Authorities, welcomes the added value of this new study on financial protection. The findings from 25 countries show the diversities and inequalities in catastrophic and impoverishing health spending. WHO guidance, to strengthen financial protection and address unmet need for health systems, is important and welcome.

But it will only have real added value if Member States act upon it with urgency.

EuroHealthNet offers a unique bridge between WHO health actions and EU powers for health across wider policies. We are engaged in taking forward implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This improves upon the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, already seen as a global standard. The Pillar importantly states: "*Everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality.*" More rights are set out concerning social protection and inclusion. They offer potential benefits for citizens. These include, for example, rights for older people who need sustainable pensions and long-term care, for people with disabilities, for families at work who need minimum incomes and fair conditions, for unemployed people, and for children who need care and support. We urge health ministries to use such available EU policy instruments. Many are transferable and can also be used in countries in the wider WHO European Region, contributing towards global goals.

EuroHealthNet is also linking the WHO report with the European Semester. The Semester is the key annual economic and fiscal guidance for individual EU Member States. This now includes stronger social and health system analyses and recommendations, plus the integration of social indicators. We will argue for the inclusion of indicators on financial protection in addition to the already existing indicator on unmet health needs.

The European Semester can help transform European health systems. It is vital to ensure that evidence on financial protection is incorporated into the 2019 Semester process as well as in Social Fairness legislation. These instruments have a direct impact on EU Member States of course, but there is much that is useful in policies and practices beyond the EU.

As was stated in the Tallinn Charter, "*It is unacceptable that people become poor as a result of ill-health.*" It is equally unacceptable that poverty and exclusion, in all their forms, are such factors in persistent health inequalities. EuroHealthNet will continue to play its part in changing that.