

Contribution from the EU4Health campaign group towards the Council Conclusions on The Economy of Wellbeing¹.

Increased and maintained action on health and reducing health inequalities should be the central pillar of the Economy of Wellbeing

Pleased with a choice of the Economy of Wellbeing as a priority theme by the current Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we, civil society organisations united in our EU4Health campaign², welcome this draft Council conclusions on the subject and put forward some suggestions to consider ahead of the adoption of the text. We trust the conclusions will contribute to the aim and guide implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** in line with the new EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. To this end, however, **strong and sustained rights-based focus** of the Economy of Wellbeing theme should prevail.

Economy of Health and Wellbeing

We believe that **increased and maintained action on health and reducing health inequalities within and between EU Member States** should constitute a central pillar of the Economy of Wellbeing.

Recent EU data shows that after years of continuous increase, gains in life expectancy have started to falter or even show signs of reverse. Health inequalities reduce economic and social productivity and lead to higher healthcare and welfare costs. In the European Union, inequalities in health are estimated to cost €980 billion per year, or 9.4 percent of European GDP³. A 50% reduction in gaps in life expectancy would provide monetised benefits to countries ranging from 0.3% to 4.3% of GDP⁴. Newest report from WHO Europe also makes a case for accelerated investments in policy areas that affect health equity beyond health services - income security and social protection, living conditions, social and human capital, and employment and working conditions. Importantly and encouragingly, these gains can be achieved “within the lifetime of a single government”⁵.

1 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11164-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

2 <https://eu4health.eu/>

3 Mackenbach JP, Meerding WJ, Kunst AE Economic costs of health inequalities in the European Union *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 2011;65:412-419.

4 <https://tinyurl.com/y65eysye>

5 *ibid*

More emphasis on prevention and mental health to complement the curative approach to dealing with diseases

We welcome the fact that the Economy of Wellbeing place the strategic importance of investing in “effective and efficient policy measures and structures”⁶, focusing on equal access for all to quality public services including health services, health-enhancing and preventative measures, strong social protection, education and training. To put it in practice, for example, within our call for putting more emphasis on preventive actions to complement the curative approach to dealing with health and diseases, greater efforts to promote mental health should improve early intervention and support to mental health problems. To this end a strategic framework for dealing with the epidemic of Chronic and Non-communicable diseases should be considered.

Balance between social cohesion and economic progress

We are pleased to see references to social, commercial, economic and environmental determinants of health, not forgetting the fiscal and digital factors that offer opportunities for the Economy of Wellbeing that works for all and prioritises a socially fair transition towards a sustainable Europe. Furthermore, we recommend that any considerations that deploy a notion of cost-effectiveness should be first and foremost guided by equity and rights-based principles that underpin our EU values. Health and social policies constitute basic public goods and therefore cannot and must not be judged against how profitable or burdensome they are. The balance between social cohesion and economic progress should also feature more prominently in the EU actions at global level.

We stand ready to further collaboration with the EU and its Member States to develop a common approach to measuring the different dimensions of the Economy of Wellbeing, indicators and impact assessments as well as types of return on investment it contributes to.

EU4HEALTH WORDING SUGGESTIONS

5. Knowledge-based policy-making requires the use of a broad set of indicators and comprehensive impact assessments and evaluation of ~~cost~~-effectiveness, **guided by equity and rights-based principles**. While it is widely accepted that GDP alone does not provide a comprehensive picture of people’s wellbeing, further collaborative efforts to develop a common approach to measuring the different dimensions of the Economy of Wellbeing are required.

6. The balance between economic progress and social cohesion lies at the heart of European integration, and **should feature more prominently in the EU actions at global level**. The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a compass for renewed upward convergence towards better working and living conditions in Europe. Delivering on the Pillar is a shared political commitment and responsibility of the Union and the Member States, and requires continuous progress and in-depth action by both sides. The Economy of Wellbeing contributes to the aim and implementation of the Pillar in line with the new EU Strategic Agenda 2019–2024. Moreover, it

⁶ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11164-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

contributes to the European Social Model empowering all people by promoting upward social and economic convergence.

[...]

10. **Gains in longer life expectancy has started to slow down or even started showing signs of reverse in some EU Member States, regions and population groups. Inequalities in health have not been closed.** Poverty and exclusion from the labour market and society exacerbate inequalities and segregation, which can lead to polarisation and instability in society. Despite the various positive developments, one in four children in the EU are living at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Adequate income support, access to social care, **affordable and accessible medicines and** health services, early childhood education care and housing, and support for labour market integration and reintegration are essential for ensuring equal opportunities for all **and reduce unjust and avoidable health inequalities in Europe.**

[...]

14. Challenges to people's wellbeing can best be mitigated when addressed at an early stage, **along social gradients** and at critical moments throughout the lifecycle. These measures include good-quality early childhood care and education, physical activity, nutrition and other healthy lifestyles as well as preventive measures **tackling the socio-economic and environmental determinants of health.**

15. Access for all to **accessible and affordable medicines and well-resourced** health services, health promotion and disease prevention, provided by a sustainable health system, is an essential element contributing to wellbeing and thus to the economy. Investment in health security contributes to effective and timely prevention, detection and response to health threats. For example, antimicrobial resistance, **air and noise pollution** as well as the increasing occurrence of disasters due to climate change and disease outbreaks have the potential to cause great damage to national economies. Greater efforts to promote mental health and **to improve early intervention and support to mental health problems** would improve the lives of millions of Europeans and contribute to a stronger economy and better working conditions.

16. The continuous growth of health expenditure is a challenge to national economies in all European countries. It is therefore crucial to address the social, commercial, economic, **fiscal, digital** and environmental determinants of health and the burden of non-communicable diseases, taking into account the risk factors such as poor diets, **air pollution,** physical inactivity, **and the harmful use of** alcohol, and tobacco. Fiscal measures can be used to direct consumption and behaviour. Shortages and high prices of medicines may prevent access to **cost-efficient,** affordable and innovative pharmacotherapy and threaten the sustainability and financing of health systems. It is therefore essential to prioritise health gains, patient safety and continuity of treatment during the entire pharmaceutical product lifecycle.

17. Technological developments, especially digitalisation and artificial intelligence, are changing the way people's wellbeing can be promoted and how public **services, including** social care and health services are delivered. This has the potential to increase the **cost-effectiveness** and efficiency of services. It is necessary to improve people's access to their health data and to make

use of the potential of such data for advancing public health and research while fully respecting applicable data protection rules and ethical principles.

[...]

20. It is crucial for the EU to develop a new post-2020 long-term strategy for sustainable **and equitable** growth, for the purpose of furthering the EU as the most competitive and socially cohesive economy in the world. It is important for the EU to show global leadership by adopting an ambitious and well-balanced new horizontal strategy in line with the commitments made in the framework of the Pillar and the UN Agenda 2030.

21. DEVELOP cross-sectoral assessment of impacts **of policies** on wellbeing in order to strengthen knowledge-based policy and decision-making.

[...]

27. ENHANCE a cross-sectoral perspective in the policy positions expressed within the different Council's preparatory bodies dealing within the European Semester in order to ensure a balanced horizontal analysis, in line with the concept of the Economy of Wellbeing, **and the Agenda 2030 for the SDGs**.

[...]

30. PROMOTE cross-sectoral collaboration and an enhanced focus on employment, social, health and education policies, **and just transition to sustainability agenda** within the European Semester process.

[...]

33. ENSURE the wellbeing benefits of digitalisation by accelerating the work on digital solutions in the promotion of health, healthcare and social policies, by strengthening the current initiatives for cross-border exchange of health and social protection data, and by deploying innovative data technologies, including artificial intelligence, while respecting data protection rules, data security and digital ethics, and PROMOTE digital inclusion **as well as INVEST in digital skills and literacy, including digital health literacy**.

[...]

39. REVIEW the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work taking into account working conditions in the changing world of work **and psychosocial risk factors**.

~~42. DEVELOP new initiatives to address disability policies beyond the current European Disability Strategy 2010–2020.~~

ADOPT a comprehensive post-2020 disability strategic framework that covers all the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and addresses the 2015 Concluding Observations of the UN CRPD Committee.

45a (new) ADOPT A strategic framework for the prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases in Europe.

On behalf of the following organisations participating in the EU4Health campaign group:

Alzheimer Europe

EuroHealthNet

European Heart Network (EHN)

European Public Health Association (EUPHA)

European Public Health Alliance (EPAH)

European Respiratory Society (ERS)

EURORDIS Rare Diseases Europe

Global Health Advocates (GHA)



ABOUT EU4HEALTH

EU4Health is a pan-European alliance of European, national and grassroots level health organisations, coordinated by a group of 21 European level health umbrella NGOs. The group shares a vision of a Europe where all people are as healthy as they can be throughout their lives. The campaign aims to ensure that EU action on health remains strong after 2020.