



Statement by EuroHealthNet

71st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Provisional Agenda item 4 “Report of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development: presentation of recommendations and conclusions”

EuroHealthNet, the European Partnership of national institutes of public health and regional health bodies, welcomes the final report of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development (the Commission), which is completed under the chairmanship of Professor Mario Monti.

We congratulate the Commission on the recommendations for investments and reforms to improve the resilience of health and social care systems, and close the inequality gaps. This is now needed more than ever before. The Commission’s final report¹ sets out an important vision by sending key messages about how to rethink policy priorities in the light of the recovery from this pandemic, and preparedness for future pandemics. Here, we highlight four of these messages, and stress how we feel they should be taken forward by heads of governments and political leaders in Europe. We make these reflections in the spirit of the new Memorandum of Understanding the EuroHealthNet Partnership signed with WHO Europe in June this year.

Firstly, the Commission stresses the need for everyone to implement the concept of ‘**One Health**’. It positions ‘One Health’ as central at all governance levels, both globally and in the European Region. This focus on the climate emergency is essential. EuroHealthNet has long been committed to sustainable development in Europe and globally, as a core part of our mission to improve health equity and well-being. We are concerned however, that the ‘One Health’ concept does not go far enough in addressing the joint challenges of health, equity, and environment. While being a useful concept which brings actors together to address concerns like antimicrobial resistance, more needs to be done. We need additional and urgent multidisciplinary action on sustainable food systems for healthy diets, a public transport system for active travel and clean air, and a general greening of the health care sector to mitigate the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, which is a threat to human and planetary health.

Secondly, the Commission is very clear on the need to take action to **close inequality gaps**. We wholeheartedly welcome this. In our INHERIT study² we found that those who are less well-off suffer not

¹ Final Report of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development, *September 2021*
<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/european-programme-of-work/pan-european-commission-on-health-and-sustainable-development>

² www.inherit.eu



only most from the negative impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, but often benefit the least from the innovation and measures taken to address them. This contributes to further health inequalities. The Commission's recommendations will have to address this form of inequality, making sure the green transition is a fair one. This will mean reforming systems, including health systems, to be truly inclusive. Indeed, our aim is to achieve a **'triple win' where health, equity, and environment are addressed together**. Health equity impact assessments should be applied to all measures related to the Commission's recommendations.

Thirdly we are pleased to see the Commission targets the **finance sector** and calls for changes in mindsets and investments. As EuroHealthNet's work has shown³, reforms such as taxation of health-harming products and subsidisation of healthy ones are important mechanisms. Environments which support investments in health promotion and disease prevention can lead to public savings on health and social care; those investments also provide a good rate of return. We need to reform health systems to make preventing diseases more financially rewarding. Striving towards an **Economy of Wellbeing** captures these ambitions and shift in mindsets.

Finally, we welcome the Commission's call for organisations and **partnerships** such as ours to "engage in and support" in the implementation of its recommendations for sustained political and societal resilience. We will do whatever we can, also as part of our MoU. But to do so effectively, we will need to know that such a participation from all affected stakeholders at all stages and all levels – including design, initiation, and evaluation of actions, as well as implementation – will be intrinsic, not just tokenistic. That means better involving Non-State Actors and civil society bodies, who have so much potential to help - if they are valued and their capacities are enhanced.

We and others can be a crucial part of the solutions. No International Organisation, State or stakeholder can achieve these complex, challenging but vital objectives alone. Indeed, as this Commission stated "we will not repair our fractures with business as usual, we need a **new and ambitious approach** that goes beyond anything we have done so far". The EuroHealthNet Partnership is ready to act now.

The EuroHealthNet Partnerships website www.eurohealthnet.eu includes links to our work, from research outcomes to practice models and examples, to policy recommendations. They will support this Report's recommendations and conclusions.

EuroHealthNet, Brussels, 8 September 2021

³ <https://health-inequalities.eu/financing-e-guide/>