

Statement by EuroHealthNet

74th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Side event 2/9/24: A New Child and Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Dear Chair, Regional Director, Honourable Ministers and Distinguished Delegates of the WHO European Region Member States,

EuroHealthNet welcomes the new Strategy for Child and Adolescent Health and Wellbeing. Since the previous WHO strategy that ended in 2020, various crises have emerged, from the pandemic to climate change and rising costs of living. The mental health of children and youth is also on the decline, with other challenges such as academic pressures, social expectations and the influence of social media impacting this. The evidence is clear that children's and adolescents' wellbeing is at risk and that **a new comprehensive strategy is fundamental**.

Schools are a particularly important place to intervene early in children's lives and promote physical and mental health. Recognising this need for action, EuroHealthNet is working towards a strong focus on wellbeing in educational settings and is leading a European Union-funded initiative called Schools4Health. We build on the **SHE - Schools for Health in Europe - Network's** ambition of **making every school a health-promoting school**.

This new WHO strategy for child and adolescent health will be an excellent instrument to boost European cooperation in the area of health-promoting schools, under the leadership of Croatia. We have three recommendations to make this happen and to strengthen the Strategy in this area:

1. **Engaging the whole school community** through participatory processes is a key mechanism to advancing health promoting school approaches. This, along with **closer collaboration across sectors** (not only with community health services and education, but also with transport, agriculture, sports and social sector etc), is what makes health promoting school approaches state of the art. This is not only important for healthier educational environments, but also to address societal issues such as poverty and inequalities.
2. The recommended actions to tackle the commercial, environmental, digital and social determinants of health should be complemented with **guidance and measures that support implementation at local level**. Communities, including schools and their surrounding environments, create the foundations for good health and local authorities must be supported with **the necessary legislation and resources**.
3. The strategy acknowledges that **child poverty** is a crucial **underlying driver of ill-health**. Monitoring and constant data collection is key to design and advocate for policy action to reduce child poverty. In doing so, we should better demonstrate **the effectiveness** of innovative policy frameworks and wellbeing-focused



investments for young people's health, and thereby further mobilise action.

The future wellbeing of our societies depends on the quality of our investments in today's children and youth. Through the Schools4Health initiative and broader health promoting efforts, EuroHealthNet Partnership will continue collaborating with the SHE Network and other organisations, including WHO, to build a healthier future for all, aligning with the strategy's forward-looking objectives.