



6th October 2020

To: EU National Health Ministers

cc: Stella Kyriakides, EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Dear Minister,

Subject: Downgrading EU health action is the wrong answer to the coronavirus crisis

I am writing to you to express our deep concerns concerning the worrying joint position of EU national leaders within the Council of the EU, reflected on the compromise proposal of the German EU Presidency mid-September on key elements of the [EU4Health programme proposal](#) and I urge you to use your influence to reverse these developments resulting in an imbalanced proposal and downgraded EU action on health, affecting the lives and well-being of millions of Europeans.

On behalf of the European Public Health Alliance, I am also expressing the concerns of public health NGOs, patient and disease groups, organisations working with vulnerable groups, healthcare and medical professionals and their thousands of members across the EU.

Many of the communities we represent have been hit the hardest by the devastating impacts of the coronavirus epidemic. Our members have channelled their experience and evidence from the field, playing a vital role to help ensure policies are appropriate and foster social trust. Some of them at local level helped ensure that essential services were maintained. At the forefront of the battle against [COVID-19](#), they need increased EU action on health to ensure we learn the lessons from the pandemic by boosting disease prevention, health promotion and public health action.

However, the current status of negotiations on the new EU4Health programme seems to indicate that national governments are proposing severe reductions of the European Commission proposal to an extent which could eventually be detrimental to population health.

We are particularly alarmed by the following **seven streams established by the Council position which significantly scales back the progressive elements of the EUHealth programme**, summarised as follows:

1. **Waters down the EU ambition on health**, limiting it to a large extent to pandemics only and downgrades the ambition by highlighting its complementary nature to member state actions
2. **Re-introduces a care-focused approach and weakens health prevention and promotion** and the EU role to regulate on these matters. As regards non-communicable

diseases (NCDs), there is **less emphasis is on the common risk factors** of cancer and other NCDs.

3. **Reduces EU action on communicable diseases:** only highlights the importance of EU delivery on the UN Sustainable Development Goals for health in the context of non-communicable diseases, and only seeks to support actions for the improvement of surveillance, diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases. This ignores communicable diseases and the important role of the EU in co-ordinating action on cross-border health threats, and building resilience of national health systems.
4. **Deletes the reference to a possible extension of current European Reference Networks (ERNs)** beyond rare diseases to communicable and non-communicable disease networks in the Commission proposal.
5. **Deletes the strengthening of the ECDC, EMA** and other agencies. This is one of the specific objectives of EU4Health and vital to tackle cross-border health threats and improve Europe's public health capability.
6. There is worryingly **reduced focus on health inequalities**, risking that the most vulnerable to poor health will once more be left behind, questioning commitment to the values on which the EU is based.
7. There is no involvement of public interest non-governmental organizations in the **EU4Health steering group**, to voice the lived experience and needs of the populations they represent, including patients, healthcare professionals, caregivers, public health professionals and ordinary people. **Moreover, it includes further restrictions to providing financial support for non-governmental organizations** and sets up additional conditions for grants, prejudicing their ability to effectively support the programme's implementation, and provide essential services to support vulnerable groups.

As the health voice within your government we ask for your support to better reflect the needs of those who want and need more EU action on health, and for national governments to work together and show more solidarity towards each other to protect and improve the health of every European.

We are counting on your voice within your government to ensure a balanced proposal that considers the different policy areas that help improve health and leaves no-one behind is put at the heart of discussions in the upcoming policy dialogue.

The public health community, from the local to the European level are counting on your support in this critically important process!

Yours faithfully

Sascha Marschang
Acting Secretary General
European Public Health Alliance