

MEPs lead urgent plea from health community to prevent health crisis in Europe

Ahead of the European Summit of June (28-29), leading Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) joined a broad coalition of organisations warning European leaders to act urgently to prevent Europe from a health crisis.

Brussels, June 22- For the first time 9 MEPs, 65 leading trade unions, civil society organisations, health organisations, and industry associations have **united in an open letter (attached)** calling on European leaders to stop cutting essential health and welfare systems and focus on ordinary people living in Europe coping with the dire impact of a financial crisis of which they are the first victims. **The toll on physical and mental health is becoming unbearable, and health systems are at breaking point.** The coalition is led by the European Public Health Alliance, whose recent briefing note summarises the evidence of the [devastating impact of the financial crisis on human health](#). The evidence in rising suicides, mental health problems, rates of infectious disease are warning signs that current policies are hurtling Europe in a dangerous direction.

For millions of people living in Europe, these last few years have been devastating in a way few had imagined Europe would face again. Rising levels of unemployment, high levels of household debt and cuts to public services have left many people desperate and in need of support. The current indiscriminate cuts to social support and healthcare not only threatens the fundamentals right of access to care, it also undermines **the core values at the heart of the European vision and the functioning of our democracies.**

*"The **present lack of political coherence and strong leadership in Europe** has cost us far too much. With social instability, inequalities, depression, and suicides ominously rising among the lower and middle classes, Europe's leaders should amend their own mistakes before it is too late,"* points out Monika Kosińska, Secretary General of [European Public Health Alliance \(EPHA\)](#). **"Public healthcare is among the worst-hit sectors across the EU. This is an inevitable outcome of blindly trusting fickle and unaccountable financial markets to set public spending priorities. At this critical juncture, European leaders should meet the legitimate expectations of citizens that put them in office in the first place, as a loss of confidence in the state's ability to support its citizens is a threat to the stability Europe takes for granted"** stresses Ms Kosińska.

European leaders must realise that, **cutting spending on essential services such as health, particularly in primary care and early intervention, is a false economy.** It will drive up long term costs, leading to the re-emergence of communicable diseases and put the burden on those people who can afford it least. The lessons learned from the crises of the past is to keep supporting people through the hard times, reform smartly and ensure you have a healthy population that can pick up when the economy improves.

The joint letter concludes that **"at this decisive time the public health community and people living in Europe look for courageous leadership from Heads of States and Government to take action on prioritising and championing the health of people, not sacrificing health for short term financial gains."**

► **Quotes from letter signatories :**

- **"Short term 'savings' that undermine access to treatment and care will create worse health outcomes and higher expenditure as patients will need more intensive and expensive interventions in the longer term. The huge impact among disadvantaged groups living with chronic diseases, including those living in poverty, children, disabled people, and older patients will increase further health disparities. This is unacceptable in a Europe built on social values and solidarity,"** notes Anders Olauson, President of the [European Patients' Forum](#).

☐ **"International law oblige States to abstain from enforcing discriminatory practices and to provide equal access**

to health services to all persons, including undocumented migrants,” says Michele LeVoy, Director of the [Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants \(PICUM\)](#)

☒ *“While we agree that we all have to contribute to the collective effort to get our economies out of trouble, **we urge EU leaders to ensure that the fundamental principle of universal access to quality and affordable health care is not put under threat.** This would have a devastating impact on Europe’s ability to recover from the current crisis,”* Anne - Sophie Parent, Secretary General - [AGE Platform](#).

☒ *“Health and productivity go hand in hand! Investing in Europe’s health systems is a fundamental step to EU’s recovery as healthy EU citizens will be the ones fostering growth and boosting the economy! Supporting innovative healthcare will contribute towards a sustainable and healthier Europe. When it comes to nurses, nurses facilitate and enable change. Therefore, engage them in your policy design so implementation becomes a reality.”* Paul de Raeve, Secretary General – [European Federation of Nurses](#)

☒ *“It is time for governments and European policy-makers to understand that **the rise in mental health problems in Europe is due as much to the crisis as to governments’ response to it.** Health budget cuts will only worsen this already dire situation, and harm the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. Ensuring appropriate care is investing in the future, and constitutes the only sustainable way out of the crisis,”* Maria Nyman, Director - [Mental Health Europe](#).

☒ *“Social workers are responsible for protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse and supporting all citizens at times of crisis. Failure to invest in such services gives rise to avoidable suffering and greater expenditure in the long term,”* Nicolai Paulsen, President of the European Region - [International Federation of Social Workers \(IFSW\)](#).

☒ *“Health and care systems are unsustainable without the unpaid work of informal carers and carers need effective support from formal health services. Carers of people with high dependency needs, due to long term serious illnesses, disabilities and extreme frailty, provide in excess of 80% of care and are net contributors to EU economies. Carers and caring work needs to be protected and developed, especially in challenging times,”* Frank Goodwin, Secretary - [Eurocarers](#)

☒ The financial crisis is affecting Europe and services are in danger of being cut. This has an adverse impact on health of women, their babies and families. As sexual and reproductive health services are a real investment in the future of European citizens European Midwives Association (EMA) would call upon governments and policy-makers to maintain their support for, and particularly their investment in, sexual and reproductive health services and systems in Europe. Mervi Jokinen, President – [European Midwives Association](#)

☒ *“The prevalence of allergic diseases in Europe is rapidly growing, together with the nature of allergens as an effect of climate change, chemicals and novel food products. Today, more than 40% of Europe’s population suffers from at least one form of allergy and it is estimated that this number will rise to 50% by 2015. Using GA²LENs existing structure, the GA²LEN Sentinel Network would play a vital role in combating the mounting socio-economic costs and allow for the creation of evidence-based guidelines at European level with timely distribution of public information at a national level.”* Prof. Torsten Zuberbier Secretary General - [GA²LEN](#)

► Background information

☒ The [Council Conclusions towards modern, responsive and sustainable health systems \(June 6, 2011\)](#) stated that *“investments in health should be acknowledged as a contributor to economic growth. While health is a value in itself, it is also a pre-condition to achieve economic growth,”* and called for the health sector to play a key role in the implementation of the EU2020 strategy.

☒ The [Council conclusions on the EPC- Commission Joint Report on health systems in the EU \(December 7 2010\)](#) stated that it is fundamental to *“ensure a sustainable financing basis, a high degree of pooling of funds and a good resource allocation that ensures equity of access; encouraging the provision and access to primary health care*

services to improve general health and reduce unnecessary use of specialist and hospital care; and improving health promotion and disease prevention also outside the health sector.”

► **Facts and figures** – from EPHA’s facts and figures on the impact of the financial crisis on health

- . In 2010 the **Portuguese** Ministry of Health budget was cut by 12.3%.
- . The overall budget for health in **Ireland** was down by €746 million - a year-on-year 6.6% cut.
- . The **Greek** health budget for 2011 was decreased by €1.4 billion.
- . The **French** government expects to reduce spending by €2.4 billion on the health insurance side - 40% of the reductions will be made through pro-generics policies and savings on medicines and medical devices.
- . In **Austria** it is planned that, between 2010 and 2013, the expenditure and foreseen budget on the healthcare sector will drop by about €1.7 billion.
- . The **Spanish** Government reduced spending on health and education by €7 Billion in 2012.
- . The **Hungarian** public health budget decreased from almost €4 billion to €1.2 billion- with a 40% cut in the pharmaceutical sub-budget.

► **Contact information**

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