

EU4Health Civil Society Alliance event

Unlocking Europe's future: Prioritising Health under the next Multiannual Financial Framework

26 March 2025 – European Parliament

On March 26th, 2025, the EU4Health Civil Society Alliance organised an event in the European Parliament to discuss the future of the European Health Union and integrating health in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The event was hosted by MEPs **Tilly Metz** (Greens, Luxembourg), **Stine Bosse** (Renew, Denmark), **Vytenis Andriukaitis** (S&D, Lithuania) and **András Tivadar Kulja** (EPP, Hungary). The panel, chaired by EPHA's **Milka Sokolović** and EPF's **Anca Toma**, gathered **Irene Norstedt** (European Commission, DG RTD), **Michele Calabrò** (EUREGHA), **Marleen Kestens** (European Heart Network) and **Marleen Bekker** (Wageningen University and EUPHA).

MESSAGES FROM THE MEPS

MEP Tilly Metz (Greens, Luxembourg) explained that health is a foundation for all other European policies. The EU4Health programme has been instrumental for public health initiatives, including prevention and digitalisation. However, despite record funding, health has lost priority post-pandemic, and funding has been redirected. MEP Tilly Metz stressed that the goal is to secure an ambitious, comprehensive health program that does not solely promote competitiveness.

MEP Stine Bosse (Renew, Denmark) mentioned that citizens remain deeply concerned about healthcare, even if attention has shifted from the pandemic, and that there is now a focus on defence and security. MEP Stine Bosse stressed that health must remain a top priority on the Commission's agenda. Preparedness is crucial, especially on ensuring medicine supply within 72 hours; strengthening medical countermeasures; and enhancing emergency response capabilities. MEP Stine Bosse added that health is part of security and competitiveness, as ensuring a strong pharmaceutical and medical devices sector is vital. The EU must be self-sufficient in healthcare to avoid crisis situations as the ones seen during COVID-19.

MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis (S & D, Lithuania) highlighted that the Commission's public consultation on the next MFF highlights a narrow view of health, focusing primarily on emergency response and predefined priorities, with little attention to broader public health perspectives. MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis added that the next MFF must invest in public health, integrate a comprehensive health approach, and address issues such as mental health, misinformation, and community trust. Health must be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting priority, with clear performance indicators acknowledging its role in resilience, inclusion, and democratic legitimacy. MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis highlighted that health should be a central priority in the EU's future.

MEP András Tivadar Kulja (EPP, Hungary) stressed that health is not just a socio-economic issue but a matter of European security, resilience, and democracy. Poor healthcare systems make people vulnerable to misinformation and populist ideas, as they feel neglected. MEP András Tivadar Kulja added that a strong health budget is necessary to address cross-country issues such as healthcare workforce shortages and rare diseases,

requiring EU coordination and collaboration. MEP András Tivadar Kulja stressed that investing in health strengthens democracy and society, as seen with successful programmes like EBCP.

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE PANEL

Milka Sokolović (EPHA) presented achievements of the EU4Health Civil Society Alliance campaign on sustainable funding, and its ongoing advocacy for the MFF. The EU4Health campaign contributed to the launch of the EU4Health program in March 2021. However, in 2021, operating grants for civil society organisations were discontinued, leading to a campaign that reinstated them for 2022. However, there were no guarantees for future funding, leaving CSOs in uncertainty. In 2025-2026, FPAs were reinstated following the Alliance's campaign, but as of March 2025, there is no information about the 2025 EU4Health work programme, leaving CSOs unsure about funding for activities they have been implementing since January. Milka Sokolović stressed the need for CSOs to access sustainable funding to remain independent and impactful in policy advocacy, and shared the Alliance's concerns about the future of health CSOs, especially those without regular funding or part of FPAs, urging the EU to provide more funding opportunities.

The panel chaired by **Milka Sokolović** and **Anca Toma (EPF)** discussion focused on the future of the European Health Union, through the MFF. **Marleen Kestens (EHN)** stressed the importance of investing in prevention to reduce the lower the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), particularly tackling cardiovascular diseases and cut healthcare costs. Legislative action is needed to tackle risk factors, including preventing health-harming industries from influencing policy decisions on health. Marleen Kestens also stressed the importance of implementing the entire European Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP), in particular its prevention aspect. She also called for more research, especially on women's health and cardiovascular diseases, as women suffer more and die faster from cardiovascular conditions than men.

Michele Calabro (EUREGHA) shared insights on healthcare workforce shortages due to aging and the aging population. Europe's demographics are shifting, which affects the healthcare workforce, as an aging population mean more chronic diseases and fewer healthcare professionals. Therefore, healthcare must remain a high-budget priority. Furthermore, it is essential to think on how to approach to issue at the regional level, as urban and rural areas have different needs. Michele Calabro also stressed the need to better integrate prevention in health systems and identify learning opportunities from the regional level and community-level solutions.

Marleen Bekker (Wageningen and EUPHA) stressed that declining social and political cohesion has changed political structures worldwide, and that a lack of trust in democratic institutions affects public health, science, and academia. The pandemic caused a temporary governance shift in Europe, leading to less transparency in decision-making and limited feedback on how policies impacted communities and economies. Marleen Bekker stressed the need to restore public trust. Strengthening EU policies and making them work at the community level is key, as people need reasons to engage, vote, and believe in the system. Marleen Bekker added that public health is a pillar of democracy. She added that research must show the broader benefits of health investments to engage other policy sectors. Budget cuts in research and academia (as seen in the U.S.) are a concern. As a result, EU-level collaboration must remain strong.

Irene Norstedt (DG Research and Innovation) stated that a healthy society is a wealthy society. Irene Norstedt added that developing safe, evidence-based interventions takes time. It is therefore essential to invest in research now. She explained that as 90% of research funds are at the Member State level, collaboration is crucial.

Irene Norstedt added that investments in multinational clinical trials were needed, as well as collaboration with Member States. She encouraged CSOs to apply to Horizon projects, and called for stakeholders to contribute to the MFF consultations.

CONCLUSIONS

Speakers shared inputs regarding what they would like to see in the next MFF. This includes more funding for research; Direct funding for citizen-led research, community resilience, redistributive welfare, and digital education; investing in public health, and improving connections between research and practice; and supporting civil society advocating for public health.

Anca Toma (EPF) concluded by stressing that without a healthy Europe, where everyone has the opportunity to live at the highest possible level of well-being, the EU cannot be competitive, productive, defend itself and project itself into the future. We must bear in mind that health is a prerequisite for all this. Anca Toma also mentioned that NGOs should propose their own health programme for the next multi-annual financial framework (MFF). The role of civil society organisations is also to propose to their constituencies - citizens, patients or carers, professionals, academics, practitioners, of all ages and backgrounds - a possible way forward.

A key lesson from this event is the importance of providing the necessary means for the EU Health Union to be properly implemented, as well as the need to continue providing long-term funding for CSOs, allowing them to play their part in this endeavour. Indeed, the event was the opportunity for the EU4Health Civil Society Alliance to stress that health should be a central pillar of the EU budget. The EU needs an ambitious European Health Union, to address rising challenges such as the burden of NCDs, healthcare workforce shortages and growing cross-border health threats. Furthermore, the event was a strong call in support to the EU4Health programme and its capacity to ensure stable and sustainable funding for health civil society organisations. Finally, it was stressed that civil society organisations should be involved from the start to achieve health objectives in the next MFF.

About EPF

The European Patients' Forum (EPF) is an umbrella organisation of patient organisations across Europe and across disease areas. Our 78 members include disease-specific patient groups active at the EU level and national coalitions of patients representing over 20 countries across Europe. www.eu-patient.eu