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EU

HEALTH SPENDING IN EUROPE IN 2010 FELL FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DECADES

Health spending per person and as a percentage of GDP fell across the European Union in 2010. This is one of the many findings in the "Health at a Glance: Europe 2012", a new joint report by the OECD and the European Commission. From an annual average growth rate of 4.6% between 2000 and 2009, health spending per person fell to -0.6% in 2010. This is the first time that health spending has fallen in Europe since 1975.

In Ireland, health spending fell 7.9% in 2010, compared with an average annual growth rate of 6.5% between 2000 and 2009. In Estonia, health expenditure per person dropped by 7.3% in 2010, following growth of over 7% per year from 2000 to 2009, with reductions in both public and private spending. In Greece, estimates suggest that health spending per person fell 6.7% in 2010, reversing annual growth of 5.7% between 2000 and 2009.

While the report does not show any worsening health outcome due to the crisis, it also underlines that efficient health spending is necessary to ensure the fundamental goal of health systems in EU countries.

Spending on disease prevention accounts for only 3% of total health spending

Governments, under pressure to protect funding for acute care, are cutting other expenditures such as public health and prevention programmes. In 2010, the expenditure was 3.2% less than the year before. This means that on average across EU countries, only 3% of a shrinking health budget was allocated to prevention and public health programmes in areas such as immunisation, smoking, alcohol drinking, nutrition and physical activity. The report emphasises that spending on prevention now can be much more cost-effective than treating diseases in the future.

The OECD and European Commission's Health at a Glance: Europe 2012 presents key indicators of health status, determinants of health, healthcare resources and activities, quality of care, health expenditure and financing in 35 European countries, including the 27 EU member states, five candidate countries and three EFTA countries.

Other findings from the report include:

- Health spending as a share of GDP was highest in the Netherlands (12%) in 2010, followed by France and Germany (11.6%). The share of GDP allocated to health was 9.0% on average across EU countries, down from 9.2% in 2009.
- Doctors: The number of doctors per capita has increased in almost all EU member states over the past decade from an average 2.9 per 1 000 population in 2000 to 3.4 in 2010. Growth was particularly rapid in Greece and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, future shortages of health workforce remain a serious concern in many European countries.

For more information, please visit: www.oecd.org/health/healthataglanceeurope.htm

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