
Public Ranks Long-Term Challenges and Health Determinants as Top Priorities for New EU



To enhance public health, the post-election European Union (EU) should prioritise long-term challenges such as climate change and the ageing population, as well as factors that influence our health, according to a new [report](#). The findings, derived from a [seven-month public debate](#) led by the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, highlight a collective call for the EU to play a more significant role in health.

The report, which is based on the public debate commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety ([DG SANTE](#)), outlines the key priorities and actions desired by citizens and stakeholders from a wide range of sectors and mostly from Europe. The analysis included more than 800 responses in [conference polls](#) and a survey, plus comprehensive inputs across [three webinars](#).

The large and participatory initiative allowed to collect public opinion on nine critical health topics: health security; determinants of health; health system transformation; the health workforce; universal health coverage; digital solutions and AI; performance and resilience; long-term challenges like climate change and ageing; and the EU's global role in health.

The Public's Calls for Action – Including Across Sectors

Participants called for the European Commission to coordinate across its different policy branches. Collaborating across sectors is considered key to delivering health priorities, making the concepts of '[Health in All Policies](#)' and '[Health for All Policies](#)' important tools for addressing the determinants of health. Interestingly, the topics which garnered the highest consensus in the discussion framework were those least controlled by the health sector alone.

Significant measures should be taken to mitigate the health impacts of environmental risks, including promoting environmental health and supporting health equity through integrated policies. Participants also considered addressing the needs of an [ageing](#) population essential, by improving health services and ensuring that health systems are prepared to meet the demands of older adults.

The public opinion suggested several actions to achieve universal health coverage (UHC) across the EU, such as ensuring equal access to comprehensive health care services for all EU citizens and financial protection for all. Other recommendations ranged from establishing a common minimum coverage package and a European health insurance scheme to focusing on underserved groups, improving health literacy, and including mental health in UHC policies.

What role for the EU?

Participants highlighted the importance of EU legal frameworks and instruments in promoting and safeguarding health, such as funding and technical support. They advocated both for new tools and for better implementation and coordination of existing mechanisms.

Aligning educational standards was raised as a key topic in the context of addressing shortages of [health workers](#), regional disparities and managing the demands for new skills. Better addressing health workforce needs and improving their working conditions to mitigate existing gaps was also discussed. There was consensus on the need for EU approaches to health workforce issues, including better coordination of initiatives and pursuit of EU wide policies.

[Digital solutions](#), health security and strengthening the EU's global voice and leadership were widely discussed but ranked slightly lower.

Possible explanations outlined in the report include the "transversal nature of digital solutions, which voters may have perceived as a means to

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achieving other priorities". The COVID-19 pandemic and sustained EU action on health security may have elicited some voters to opt for other topics that have received less policy attention in recent years.

Survey, Webinars, and Conference Polls

The [report](#) synthesized data collected through polls at public health conferences, three interactive webinars, and a stakeholder survey.

More than 500 people participated in the opinion polls, ranking the topics by order of importance. Survey responses analysed in the report surpassed 300, coming from 48 countries, with 81% based in an EU Member State. Around one-third were under the age of 40, and 60% were between 40 and 69 years old. Most respondents worked in the public sector, with significant representation from academia, research organizations, government, multilateral organizations, civil society, and the private sector.

Topics beyond the framework were raised with a set of common concerns emerging, namely: non-communicable and chronic diseases, including cancer and cardiovascular diseases; mental health; equity; public health, prevention and health promotion; political determinants of health; and health services and provision to meet patients' needs.

"As the new European Parliament and Commission commence their mandates, the outcomes from this public debate can serve as a source of inspiration, offering innovative ideas, highlighting areas of unmet need and sketching out concrete proposals for action to design health policies that meet EU citizens' needs, wishes and expectations," the report reads.

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