The Ambitions of a European Health Union

The European Health Union (EHU) concept emerged in 2020 as a vision for enhancing cooperation and resilience in public health across the European Union (EU). While the initial focus was on emergency preparedness, the Belgian government, during its Presidency of the EU, emphasised the need for a more comprehensive approach. As Europe continues to face health challenges, the EHU must promote not only crisis response but also the overall resilience of national healthcare systems and equitable access to health resources.

Strengthening Public Health Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities in Europe's public health systems. The Belgian government advocated for an EHU that prioritises public health resilience, ensuring healthcare systems are not only prepared for emergencies but also capable of delivering high-quality care in everyday circumstances. Key measures include tackling medicine shortages and addressing workforce gaps in healthcare. The EU can better withstand future health crises and improve overall health outcomes by strengthening public health systems.

Addressing Inequalities Through Prevention

A core ambition of the EHU should be to address the social inequalities that contribute to varying health outcomes across member states. Preventable risk factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and poor diet disproportionately affect lower-income populations. The EU has a unique opportunity to relaunch collective action on public health policies targeting these risk factors. By prioritising prevention, the EHU can help level the playing field and create a healthier, more equal European population.

Ensuring Universal Access to Medicines

Another key objective of the EHU should be the universal accessibility of medicines across all EU member states. When left unchecked, the pharmaceutical market often favours wealthier countries, leading to disparities in access to essential drugs. A European Health Union should harness the EU's market-shaping power to ensure that all citizens can access new and affordable medicines regardless of their country's size or wealth. This is a critical test of the EU's commitment to solidarity in healthcare.

The ambition of a European Health Union must go beyond emergency preparedness. It should aim for resilient public health systems, tackle inequalities through prevention, and ensure universal access to medicines. While respecting national healthcare sovereignty, the EHU must offer collective solutions to everyday challenges, fostering a healthier and more united Europe.

Source: [The Lancet Regional Health](#)

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