

# **EUHPF - Open Letter on Economic Crisis and Health**

## **European Union Health Policy Forum - Open Letter on Economic Crisis and Health**

As the inter-governmental meetings including the annual EU Spring Summit to address the current global economic situation are being prepared, we, the organisations collectively comprising the EU Health Policy Forum call upon everyone to do all within your powers to protect the health and well-being of this, and future generations, as a priority.

We do so in the firm, evidence-based knowledge that the positive link between health and economic sustainability is clear. It is a key part of the solution to the problems we are facing, which vary in their substance between European member states but have massive consequences for all.

Not only is a healthy population a necessary condition for a healthy economy - we have a Healthy Life Years Structural Indicator as part of the Lisbon Strategy but we should not forget that we need a healthy population in order to recover rapidly. Healthy Europeans create, find and keep jobs, and they are better able to cope with insecurity and stress. The EU Mental Health Pact alludes to this, and several authoritative EU-based studies have shown the connection between “health and wealth”.

The health sector alone constitutes 10% of EU GDP. Health services and related bodies are among the largest employers in the European Union. Supporting industries and public services are crucial factors in every state economy. Disease prevention plus timely and effective access to treatments and services is an essential component of the economic fabric of every community in every country.

Delays and lower standards, including in safety at work and environmental protection, mean the number and duration of hospital admissions increases. This leads to a greater cost burden on essential services, a higher cost for the

health sector itself, plus associated welfare and other costs. No state wants that.

We are monitoring with growing concern announcements and the impacts of reduced budgets for health and social expenditure in certain EU states. We note with alarm increasing social unrest in certain states. We are aware of increasing social and health inequalities within and between states. Based on what we know already, we can predict the dire impact that will have on the determinants of health - and for economic effectiveness, social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

We compare that with the evidence that investment in health - health and well-being for all, not simply the absence of disease - is widely beneficial. We recall that history shows that states that invested in health in the past century performed more sustainably than those who reduced investment. We call on everyone to heed those lessons and thoroughly investigate options for investment in health capacities, knowledge and infrastructures (including e-health) as part of efforts you are making to stimulate economic recovery.

We recognise that governments alone cannot solve all problems, nor deserve all criticism. We know the roots, implications and solutions of the current situation are essentially global. We represent and reflect the needs and views of organisations with members across every state of the EU and well beyond. We seek to work closely with a range of stakeholders internationally including public, private and voluntary bodies, researchers, innovators and experts, individual citizens and communities.

We seek leadership from Heads of European States and Governments with bold and decisive action that means prioritising, protecting and providing for the health of people, not sacrificing health for short term financial gains or economic panaceas. Short-term solutions of cutting health and social expenditure proposed in some Member States are short-sighted and will damage the economic recovery prospects for Europe as a whole.

We commit - as we are doing in our strategic plan addressing economic, social, environmental, demographic and technological policy priorities related to health - to work constructively with governments and other stakeholders

such as the World Health Organisation and European Union Institutions to help to meet these challenges. Their recommendations for specific actions in health and sustainable development should be carefully considered.

Now, however, it is the time for each Government to commit to act strongly for health. Every public survey shows their health is at the top of citizens' concerns, and many will take it into account in forthcoming EU wide elections. We urge you to keep it at the top of your agendas too, and await your responses.

21 January 2009, Brussels.

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