

To Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Brussels, 08 June 2020

The European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for the Hospitals and Healthcare sector (SSDC HS), composed of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) and the European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association (HOSPEEM), would like to share our view on the EU4Health programme proposed in the context of the revised Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027, looking forward to our involvement in discussions and consultation of the details of the programme and its implementation.

In the past months, the healthcare workforce, including doctors, nurses, healthcare assistants and support staff as well as hospital and healthcare employers, have been on the frontline, guaranteeing the delivery of essential healthcare services while facing an unprecedented crisis. The pandemic is not yet under control, and a high level of preparedness will be needed in the short- and long-term. We consider it essential to secure closer cooperation at the European level in this sector. The challenge will be to invest in the health workforce and modernisation of health system infrastructures supporting the capacity to cope with future crises. As the latest findings of the European Commission<sup>1</sup> show, social infrastructure investment needs in health have risen to €70 billion compared to €20 billion before the crisis.

Following the new proposal by the European Commission on 27 May 2020<sup>2</sup>, we are pleased to see the inclusion of a new standalone EU4Health programme, with a budget of €9.4 billion, aiming “to support the Member States and the EU to build up capacity and preparedness for future health crises.” We look forward to more detailed information, outlining how the new programme will deliver, in the long-run, well-performing and resilient public health systems and ensure the investment needs are met. While the Member States hold primary responsibility for organising and delivering health services and medical care, EU health policy has a crucial role in complementing national systems.

Future EU priorities need to reflect the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, healthcare, including the efficient provision of services to safeguard patients' well-being and the safety of the health staff, is key. The EU4Health programme should build on the response to the pandemic and the challenges to national health systems, increasing their resilience in preparation for any potential future health threats. We propose that sustainable synergies are created between the EU4Health programme and other key financial and policy instruments (such as Horizon Europe, rescEU, the Digital Single Market as well as European funds targeted towards regional development, social issues and cohesion), which will also support other health-related policy mechanisms.

Finally, the EU4Health programme should also pay attention to reducing inequities and inequalities between health systems to improve the quality of healthcare. It is essential to invest in frameworks that support national self-sufficiency in terms of recruitment and retention of the health workforce,

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document: Identifying Europe's recovery needs. Accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Europe's moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation*, 27 May 2020, SWD(2020) 98(final), available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/assessment\\_of\\_economic\\_and\\_investment\\_needs.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/assessment_of_economic_and_investment_needs.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Europe's moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation*, 27 May 2020, COM(2020) 456(final), available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-europe-moment-repair-prepare-next-generation.pdf>

ensuring a high level of preparedness in the future, while at the same time respecting the competences of national social partners and the autonomy of Member States' healthcare systems.

As European sectoral social partners in the health sector, we firmly believe that the programme should be built on the experience and contribution of those that operate hospitals and healthcare facilities as well as those that provide healthcare services in Europe. **For this reason, we urge the European Commission to ensure full and regular consultation with stakeholders and social partners to ensure that the programme reflects the reality and prospective needs of this sector.**

Kind regards, on behalf of EPSU and HOSPEEM



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