

Using Best Practice to Champion Health

Contributed by Euregha

During the Open Days 2009, EUREGHA has organised, together with DG Health and Consumers and COCIR a series of conferences focused on health-related matters. With the intent of giving value to the role of regional and local authorities in health promotion and prevention, EUREGHA lead a conference centred on best practices championing health held on the 7th October 2009, from 4.45 pm to 6.30 pm, at the Committee of Regions. The debate revolved around a series of questions: How can regions pursue greater access to health services and better health outcomes for all EU citizens? What are the tools that help regions in achieving these goals? What is the current state of play and what should be done by regions to improve these results?

Stemming from different perspectives, there was a choral consensus that one necessary pre-condition for action in health is leadership, being the driven factor enabling greater investment in health promotion and prevention. In line with this assumption, some best practices promoted by the EU, regional and local authorities and private actors, were presented as innovative solutions.

Debate

Robert Madelin pointed out "Health inequalities" as the most looming challenge requiring action from local and regional actors in order to tackle the large number of avoidable diseases affecting especially the less well-off citizens. Being a top priority in the political agenda of the European Commission, Mr. Madelin explained the means and tools provided by the European Commission at disposal of Regions to better invest in health: "There are now tools helping regions to promote community-based health promotion strategies" – said Madelin while referring to different initiatives promoted by the EC such as the Public Health Programme, INTERREG and the Regions of Knowledge Programmes, to mention but a few.

"Notwithstanding the significant amount of resources available, the level of action is less than it should be" – stressed Mr. Madelin and concluded by emphasising the need of regional leadership so as to seize the opportunities for cooperation in the field of health.

Luigi Bertinato illustrated the importance of soft and hard investment in health through cooperation strategies, the use of the European Funding Programmes and the exchange of best practices within European regional networks. In particular, he referred to the strategic approach of the Veneto Region to cooperation projects aiming at maximising the existing resources and overcoming the geographical boundaries that have separated for many decades Western and Eastern European Regions. "In fact, since the fall of the iron curtain, the Veneto Region has strengthened the collaboration with the neighbouring County of Jesenice (Slovenia), the Region of Carinthia (Austria) and Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy) whereby the creation of a Joint Training Centre for health professionals called SANICADEMIA" commented Mr. Bertinato. In addition to this initiative, Mr. Bertinato gave emphasis to the outstanding experience gained through the participation in EU projects and European networks: "large resources have been earmarked to improve our cooperation in EU projects and now we count 15 ongoing projects and 5 in the negotiation phase. This is the result of our continual investment in exchange of best practices and benchmarking whereby the involvement in European networks such as EUREGHA" concluded Mr Bertinato.

Christian Roy presented a cutting-edge multi-stakeholder project, EPODE, aiming at fighting obesity and improving physical activity in childhood. This large-scale project is in fact recognised as a best practice since it involves a broad partnership including industrial partners, SMEs, local health authorities and schools. By committing public and private actors, it was possible to involve almost 20% of the population, as in the case of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Mr. Roy highlighted that a precondition of success for such a large scale intervention was the formal commitment of mayors who have committed their respective municipalities in this project for 5 years.

Noreen Caine outlined the initiative called Research and Innovation Alliance established by the NHS in order to stimulate research and innovation so as to meet its objectives. The Alliance aims to develop and oversee the implementation of a regional strategy aimed at adding value to health research and innovation in the East of England through the active involvement of key stakeholders in the research and innovation community across the NHS, academia, local enterprise and industry. The rationale for the strategy was that bringing these interests together within a common strategic framework would add value, and enable us to better meet collective needs to generate and deliver high quality research and innovation into practice, thereby improving the health and wealth of the region.

Christian Lovis presented an innovative EU co-funded project, Debug IT, aiming at tackling infectious diseases and improving the quality and safety of care through the implementation of interoperable health information systems. Being a cooperation project, Mr. Lovis stressed the initial limitations caused by the different legal frameworks in which each partner operates and pointed out the joint effort that was made to enable the technical, semantic, legal and ethical interoperability of the information collected. This procedure allowed the creation of a virtual platform collecting clinical and research data from different countries and connecting health professionals across Europe.

Conclusions

In relation to the questions addressed by the moderator and focusing on how can regions pursue greater health and what should be done to achieve greater results, it was discussed that:

- There is a large range of tools offered by the European Commission to promote community-based health promotion strategies that are still not fully utilised;
- Greater regional leadership is needed to reduce the health inequalities between and within Member States;
- Cooperation, exchange of best practices and benchmarking in the health sector are important learning processes conducive to greater health outcomes;
- Partnership between private and public actors is a key component of sustainable solutions and large-scale projects.

More information on other websites:

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