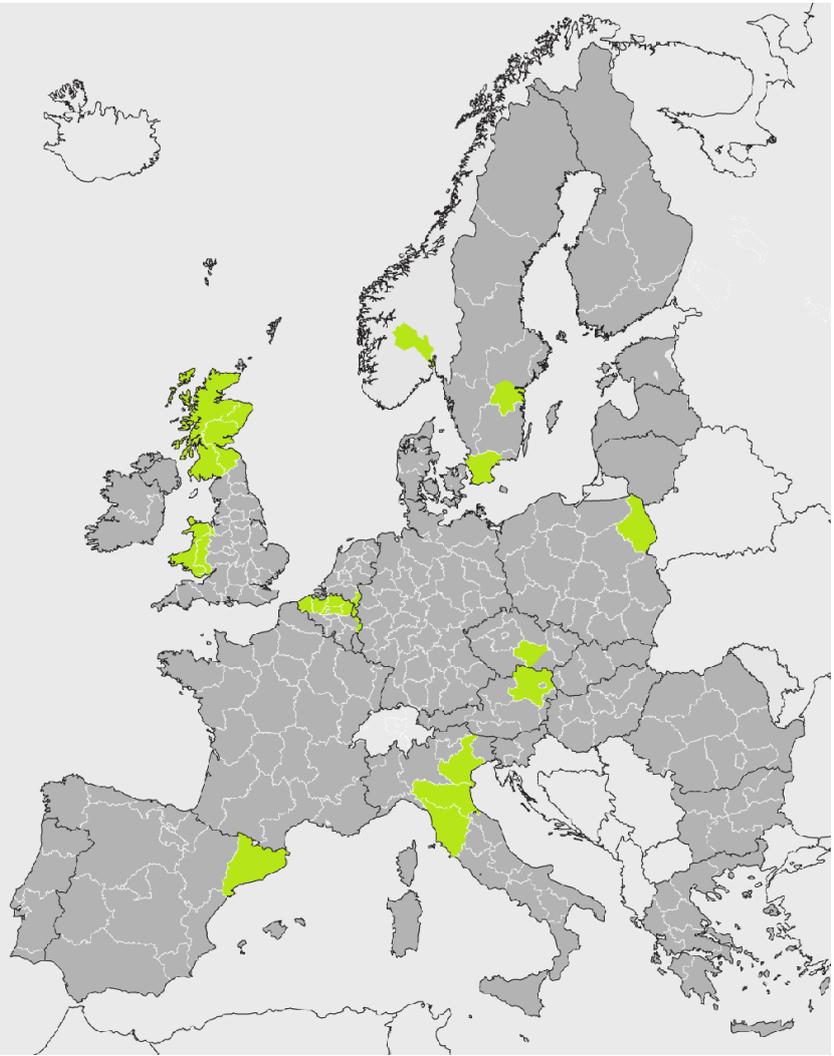


EUREGHA CHAIR'S STATEMENT ON THE COR CONSULTATION ON THE OWN- INITIATIVE REPORT “IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HEALTH STRATEGY

2010



In response to the Consultation on the Own-Initiative report “the role of the regional and local authorities in the implementation of the Health strategy”, launched by European Committee of the Regions’ Subsidiarity Monitoring Network (SMN), the European Regional and Local Health Authorities Network, hereafter referred as EUREGHA, will outline the opinion of its Chair, currently taken up by a representative of the region of Flanders (Belgium).

With kind regards to the Regions of Veneto’s and North West England’s Brussels Offices for their support.

The following response does not reflect the point of view of the single regions members of EUREGHA since it is the result of the work of the EUREGHA chair.

INTRODUCTION

Large differences in health status, health systems exist within and between the EU Member States.

In this context, the regional or territorial dimension of health policy plays a key role due to its closeness to citizens. The EU Health Strategy 2008-2014 gives opportunities and challenges for regions and for the local level to mainstream health in the EU Policy Agenda. The main challenge is to streamline the synergies and to get better organised amongst regions and in Europe.

RESPONSE

The starting point for all health policy makers, be it at European, national, regional or local level, is to protect and improve the health of their citizens.

Local and Regional Health authorities are close to their own citizens and are therefore best placed to understand their health needs, challenges and the potential workable solutions.

Even though large differences in health status and in health systems exist, all European regions face the same challenges for the near future: on one hand, there is the demographic evolution, with an ageing population, requiring more care, and less people able to provide this care. On the other hand, the economic crisis has forced all levels of governance to think carefully about the best use of our public finances. Cuts in public spending will be necessary in the public and private sector across Europe. Health systems, no matter how they are financed will not be immune from budgetary constraints and will have to adapt to this changing landscape. However, economists and health policy makers agree that investment in health is necessary, even now, in order to create a healthier society and economy in the long term. Policy makers at all levels, including the European level should therefore be bold and positively invest in the health of their citizens.

Health should remain at the core of EU policy initiatives. Health prevention and promotion should be seen as an economic driver and as a long-term opportunity. Investing in prevention can save money for care; investing in care creates work; investing in innovation can boost the economy. Many regions are focusing their policy making on investment in innovation in the health sector in a broad sense. It contains actions in patient-centred care, development and implementation of e-health applications, development of reference networks for highly specialised health care, investing in jobs in the social profit sector and in basic and translational research. It should be underlined that health initiatives need more to be geared from care towards prevention. The cost-effectiveness of preventive measures has been proven and this evidence should be shared.

The decentralisation of health issues from the national to the regional and/or local level structures the implementation of the Health Strategy differently from other EU policy areas. There is a clearer interest for the regional and local level to be more involved and interested in the EU policy making.

The ambition of the regional and local level is not merely to increase the age of the population, but mostly to improve people's healthy life expectancy. Investing in disease prevention is thus an important focus for health policy makers, for which we work with health targets and action plans. This is a field par excellence where the EU level can have added value, where regions and local level can and should learn from each other, and join forces, also with the EU Institutions.

In essence, even in an economic crisis, it is possible to create a win-win situation that improves the health of citizens, whilst developing our economic needs, if we share expertise and cooperate across sectors and levels of governance to create sensible, health promoting policies for European citizens.

The basic principles of policy making should not differ over Europe, in a way the following analysis tree is simple but logical:

1. First identify the health threat with the largest impact (the biggest killer)

2. Then see if we can do something about it
3. Look for evidence based strategies to tackle it
4. Find resources to invest in the implementation of these strategies

In an ideal situation, actions at different levels should be synchronised and be complementary, so that they strengthen each other. In order to approach this ideal, the regional level should also be involved in the process of policy development at the EU-level, ideally as early as possible in this process.

Amongst regions it is necessary to learn more about our priorities and to communicate them. Communication and cooperation about our priorities and our solutions in health is transparent and constructive and should be the basis for further collaboration.

CONCLUSION

The Future EU health strategy will have to build on the existing strategy and should work towards:

- Creating an environment of cooperation and companionship in the creation of health policy at EU level, that involves local and regional stakeholders.
- Demonstrating the relevance of the strategy to the local and regional stakeholders who are closest to the citizens of Europe.
- Learning from the economic crisis and seeking to create win-win situations that promote the health of European citizens and the health of our economies.
- Investing in health should be the long-term approach: prevention rather than care.
- Integrating the new strategy and its objectives into other overarching EU strategies.
- Integrating the Healthy Life Years Indicator into the benchmarking of the EU 2020 Strategy.
- Promoting communication and cooperation at all levels of governance and over all relevant sectors, but in particular amongst health authorities.
- Creating an environment where health inequalities are seen as simply unacceptable and that they can be overcome if the appropriate environment is created.
- Incorporating health initiatives and policy should as a multi-level governance issue
- Further integrating the 'health in all policies' approach to EU policy making
- Allocating adequate financial resources for the implementation of the strategy, with European public health programmes that enable regional and local health authorities to learn and improve the health of their citizens rather than restrict them.

The European Union is able to provide impetus and incentive for all levels of governance to invest in improving health, despite a limited competence in the field of health. This potential must be realised if we are to achieve a high level of health for all EU citizens. Local and regional authorities are ready to take up the challenge and are well placed to deliver tailored results for their own populations. The EU must encourage, not stifle this and facilitate further exchange and cooperation amongst regions and local authorities where possible and useful.

EUREGHA is the reference network for European Regional and Local Health Authorities. We bring together a critical mass of knowledge and expertise and encourage diversity with the purpose of helping our members to improve the efficiency and quality of health systems and services in Europe.

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