



PRESS RELEASE

EUREGHA's High-level Annual Conference 2021

"Make the European Health Union a reality: The regional perspective"

Bruxelles, 9th December 2021

Today, EUREGHA – the reference network of European Regional and Local Health Authorities – held its High-Level Annual Conference online. The virtual gathering was an occasion to trigger an insightful discussion on the future of the European Health Union and the role of Regions in making this ambitious project a reality. High-level representatives of the European Parliament and European Commission set the context for contributions by EUREGHA members, who presented the association's vision and the activities carried out over the past year.

"Health is the future and the current pandemic should have been teaching us. We need a European Health Union to be soundly prepared in the years to come, whatever it is". With these words, **Giovanni Gorgoni**, Chair of EUREGHA, opened the session and pointed out: *"However, health is the future only if it is equal and of value. We can make it that way starting from communities, which are the elementary bricks for building cohesion and are best represented by Regions."*

Cristian-Silviu Buşoi, Chair of the ITRE Committee at the European Parliament, began: *"To build a European Health Union, three elements are crucial: political will, a shift of paradigm towards investments, and coordination between Member States. Part of the EU health package is to reinforce the roles of EMA and the ECDC, and with the addition of HERA as well, I believe we are better prepared for the future."*

"Supporting European health care systems to become more resilient and accessible to all Europeans is our priority", said **Normunds Popenis**, Deputy Director-General at DG REGIO, adding: *"We must make sure that all Regions reform and invest in an efficient way. We will be discussing the possibility to create a Thematic Platform for Health and Wellbeing under the Smart Specialisation framework to support better innovation in health."*

Maya Matthews, Head of Unit of Performance of Health Systems, DG SANTE, pointed out: *"Regions are in the forefront of health challenges. The European Commission will support countries and Regions through*

knowledge transfer, pilots, and twinning activities targeted to strengthen local capacities in health system resilience”.

Irina Kalderon Libal, Policy officer at eHealth, Wellbeing and Ageing unit, DG CNECT emphasised the role of digitalisation: *“Technology plays an important part in delivering care to those in need, but also to those who give care. Collaboration between EU Regions for the uptake of digital technologies is essential for the transformation of Health and Care delivery in Europe.”*

As the pandemic has clearly shown, a multi-sectoral and multi-level approach is needed: *“If one thing became clear during the COVID-crisis, Health and Wellbeing have a place in All Policies. Success lies in creating ownership, that is having all the actors on board working together, and mechanisms to make these partnerships sustainable”*, stressed **Solvejg Wallyn**, Policy Officer at Flemish Community, Agency Care and Public Health.

This is the right time to push for a Health Union. **Sally Lewis**, Director of the Welsh Value in Health Centre, affirmed: *“Never has there been a more important time to focus on the equitable improvement of outcomes and sustainability of healthcare systems and to do this we must collaborate across Europe, approaching the task through the lens of value.”*

Collaboration should be envisioned with value and innovation as cornerstones. According to **Andrea Pavlickova**, International Engagement Manager at TEC and Digital Healthcare Innovation of Scottish Government: *“Having consistent EU vision for healthcare transformation is essential in driving Member States’ efforts to build resilient healthcare systems, however its implementation depends on the readily available tools, frameworks and resources”.*

Cancer represents one of the major burdens in Europe, and Regions are at the forefront: *“To effectively implement the European Cancer Plan, regions may provide a valuable contribution by sharing their good practices in crucial areas, such as integrated cancer care, promoting equity of access and care, empowering the patients and assuring the communities’ involvement”*, stated **Maria Luisa Moro**, Director of the Regional Agency for Health and Social Care of Emilia-Romagna.

Following this vision, the EUREGHA Annual Conference marked the launch of a Booklet on Cancer showcasing EUREGHA members’ best practices.

The event fell in an intense week for the European Union, as two days earlier, on 7th December, the EPSCO Council approved its conclusions on ‘Strengthening the European Health Union’. The document proves the political commitment of the Member States and the European Union in the construction of a Health Union, highlighting the need for strategic investments and better collaboration between and within countries. What emerged from the Annual Conference follows this path and confirms the need to look at a multi-sectoral and multi-level dialogue to build together a common vision to make the European Health Union a reality.