

Position Paper on a New Joint Action on Health Inequalities

European Regional and Local Health Authorities (EUREGHA) is a Brussels based network with the mission to bring local and regional health authorities together, as a means to improve health policy in Europe. In this position paper, EUREGHA would like to bring forth a number of recommendations to the Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities regarding a new Joint Action on Health Inequalities.

KEY MESSAGES

A new Joint Action on Health Inequalities should:

- Recognise the key role of local and regional authorities in creating and implementing policies to tackle health inequalities
- Take a whole-of-government approach to health equity, including the mandatory inclusion of all levels of governance
- Safeguard the dual role of the health system, as both a deliverer and a steward of health services, and as a steward of health and equity in other relevant sectors.

OVERVIEW

The expectations on a new Joint Action on Health Inequalities from governments and authorities at local, regional and national level will differ depending on their competences and resources. Furthermore, it will be influenced by their varying experiences in implementing strategies and actions against inequalities.

Our overall expectations on a new Joint Action on Health Inequalities is for it to effectively address the social inequalities of health, based on a whole-of-government approach, while including all levels of governance (from local to national and international). The final output of a new Joint Action should be to provide policy makers with evidence based tools to develop plans and strategies to tackle health inequalities.

A new Joint Action on Health Inequalities should look into how health authorities in the Member States can comply with the 'dual role' of the health system; as both a deliverer and a steward of health services, and as a steward of health and equity in other relevant policy areas. The actions should focus on how to create a win-win situation for, and between, health and other policy areas.

The outputs of the first Joint Action on Health Inequalities - "Equity Action" - and of other European or global initiatives need to be taken into consideration when designing the new Joint Action.

Strategies to create a whole-of-government or whole-of-society approach in order to tackle health inequalities take many forms. We can distinguish strategies to tackle health inequalities directly from initiatives that are driven by overarching policy agendas, such as health in all policies, sustainable policy development or target group policies (anti-poverty, children, youth, and equal opportunities etc.). However, the role and the cooperation of the local and regional level, and the interaction between different levels of governance are pre-requisites for success.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

EUREGHA encourages a new Joint Action on Health Inequalities to take the following specific recommendations into account¹:

RECOGNISING THE KEY ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

- Including the local and regional levels is mandatory for a genuine whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach
- Invite local and regional entities as Associated Partners, as they are crucial for creating and implementing policies on health equity. The European and national level create the umbrella, but the local and regional levels implement and develop policies
- Consider the possibility of testing the actions of a new Joint Action in pilot sites at local and regional level during its course of implementation.

RECOGNISING THE NEED OF A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO HEALTH EQUITY

- Share and learn from coordination processes of multi-level governance initiatives that are already implemented in Europe
- Develop training courses for policy makers at all levels of governance to strengthen the implementation of a whole-of-government approach in practice
- Incorporate Health Impact Assessment with a focus on equity as an element in the above mentioned training courses, as an efficient way of assessing the impact of approaches and strategies to tackling health equity
- Pilot the training courses at the local and regional levels to support and stimulate the development of strategies, as well as identifying and addressing potential challenges with a whole-of-government approach
- Assess the impact of approaches and strategies on health inequalities, and apply them to related strategies, such as anti-poverty plans and plans for sustainable policy development
- Develop and implement a monitoring system to measure and assess the extent of health inequalities, to facilitate strong actions and policies to efficiently tackle health inequalities.

HIGHLIGHT THE REDUCTION OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES IN EU POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

- Consider the outputs from the first Joint Action on Health Inequalities - [Equity Action](#) –and other European or global initiatives, such as the European project [DRIVERS](#) and [SOPHIE](#), when designing the new Joint Action

¹ The recommendations are based on the document “[Recommendations on EU Support for Local and Regional Action on Health Equity](#)”, jointly formulated with EuroHealthNet and SALAR as a follow-up to the conference “Tackling Health Inequalities in Europe – What can EU do to support the work done at regional and local level?” that took place in Brussels on 5 November 2014.

- In addition, the results from the two tenders from DG SANTE on health inequalities² that will be ending around the start of a new Joint Action also need to be taken into consideration.

FACILITATE INCREASED ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

- Take into account the lessons learned from previous and existing strategies and their implementation at the local and regional level, including the use of tools to monitor, evaluate (indicators, data, create more evidence) and assess their health impact
- Develop tools to support the evaluation of the effectiveness of community-centred and asset-based approaches to tackle inequalities
- Encourage participatory processes - co-creation and identification of the roles of the different layers in governance with a focus on specific policy areas: pensions, finances and education etc. A new Joint Action should also make a case for methods to sensitive health- and wellbeing workers at the local level
- Facilitate for the local and regional level to play a role in scaling-up of innovative strategies, including through coaching and twinning between local and regional entities.

² Call for tender n° SANTE/2014/C4/034 concerning a pilot project related to the development of evidence based strategies to improve the health of isolated and vulnerable persons; and the call for a tender n° SANTE/2014/C4/032 concerning a pilot project related to reducing health inequalities: building expertise and evaluation of actions.