

Press release

## EUREGHA High-level Annual Conference 2023

### *“Beyond 2024: discussing the future of EU health policy and innovation from the regional and local perspective”*

Brussels, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Yesterday, on 5<sup>th</sup> December, EUREGHA - the reference network for European Regional and Local Health Authorities – held its Annual Conference at the European Committee of the Regions, titled *“Beyond 2024: discussing the future of EU health policy and innovation from the regional and local perspective”*. The event has been confirmed to be the most prominent annual appointment for the network, hosting 80 participants coming from different regions across Europe, as well as representatives of EU institutions and key European stakeholders involved in health policies, workforce and research. Thanks to the participation of high-level speakers, the event gave a unique setting to boost a multi-level dialogue on the future of health policy in the European Union, in the light of upcoming European elections of spring 2024. In this respect, the Conference was the occasion for EUREGHA to launch its *Manifesto for 2024 and beyond*, stressing regional priorities and recommendations for the next EU mandate and a *Booklet of best practices on health data*, a collection of virtuous examples from EUREGHA regions.

To do the honours, **Giovanni Gorgoni** and **Michele Calabro**, respectively EUREGHA’s Chair and Director. The keynote opening speech was entrusted by **Maya Matthews**, Head of Unit ‘State of Health, European Semester, Health Technology Assessment’, at DG SANTE, European Commission, who recalled the recent initiatives at the EU health-policy level, such as the strengthening of EMA and ECDC mandates, the creation of HERA, the Cancer Plan and the mental health strategy (to mention few), and highlighted the role of regions as forefront actors to address health challenges and drive innovation: *“The last EU mandate led to many achievements in health, from cross-border health threats to cancer, from health data to mental health. The momentum is still there, and EUREGHA’s Manifesto captures very well where we are today. Regions are at the forefront of health challenges and drivers of innovation, and we should amplify their best practices”*.

**Michele Calabro** quickly presented the [EUREGHA Manifesto](#), stressing the key role of the regional and local dimension in the European Health Union project, from EU governance to prevention and care, from innovation to cross-border cooperation. A panel debate followed, where speakers were asked to react and share their priorities for the future of health in the EU. **Fabian Dominguez**, Team Leader – Team International Policy, Coordinator Belgium, EU presidency 2024, put integrated care under the spotlight: *“Integrated and long-term care is essential to ensure citizens’ wellbeing and healthcare systems resilience in the EU, and to support the transition toward more patient-centred systems”*. To complement, **Milka Sokolovic**, Director General, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), brought the perspective of public health civil society organisations, adding *“The European Health Union will be successful only if we have structured multi-level governance, from dedicated health EU representatives to the strong involvement of regions, as crucial players in implementing policies, bringing EU closer to people and supporting local initiatives from civil society.”*. Ms. Sokolovic also had a special mention to healthcare workforce, which was recalled again by **Maya Matthews**: *“The healthcare workforce must be indeed a pillar for the European Health Union. But it’s not only about shortages. We should also look at the demand, which is increasing. And skills are equally key. To be up to speed and promptly address these challenges, we need more data. Investing in the data system is crucial.”*. According to **Jean-Luc Vanraes**, Member of the European Committee of the Regions from the Uccle Municipality (BE), the concept of subsidiarity is fundamental when it comes to healthcare in Europe, and added *“the EU has a big role in facing current and upcoming challenges, such as access to medicines and health workforce brain drain”*.

The second panel dived deep into the **importance of health data and current key initiatives in this field**. The debate was kicked off by three presentations from EUREGHA members GGD Zuid Limburg (NE), Scotland (UK) and Basque

Country (ES), who gave an overview of their best practices featuring the [EUREGHA Booklet](#) on Health Data published officially on that date, which gathers thirteen practices from nine regions across Europe. **Sara Cerdas**, Member of the European Parliament and Shadow Rapporteur of the European Health Data Space file, commented: *“We have a lot to learn from regions. When it comes to the EHDS, we need to ensure that it will be fit for purpose, and solve the confidentiality matter. Another perspective is the plenty of research and innovation opportunities that this framework will bring, medical and non”*. **Martin Dorazil**, Deputy Head of Unit ‘Digital Health’ at DG SANTE, European Commission, followed: *“The EHDS will bring new potential for secondary use of data. This will be important for regional health authorities when dealing with decisions about public health issues, preparedness, or system organisation, thanks to easier and faster access to data”*. Also, the issue of data quality was raised as a key element for a successful EHDS. As **Kurt Höller**, Managing Director of the EIT Health Germany-Switzerland Co-location Centre said: *“The EHDS is not about the technology itself, which might differ from region to region. We need to work to ensure that data are of high quality, clearly structured, consistent and comparable.”*. The regional voice had space in the debate thanks to the participation of **Ryan Anderson**, Policy Lead for Data & Intelligence at the Scottish Government’s Directorate for Health and Social Care, Finance, Digital and Governance, **Nicole Smeets**, Researcher at GGD Zuid-Limburg, and **Gotzone Sagardui**, Minister of Health of the Basque Country. By bringing concrete examples, it emerged how challenges are similar despite the different regional contexts, and some elements were particularly stressed, such as ethical approach and transparency, the need for cross-border comparable data, co-design approaches and patient empowerment.

In his closing remarks, **Giovanni Gorgoni** reminded the audience that *“Working for people's health means working for people's freedom”* and recalled the importance of political commitment and vision in the years to build a strong and effective European Health Union, with regions playing a crucial role in making it a reality.

For more information about the conference, click [here](#) and stay tuned for more updates and session materials.