

Press release

Realising the potential of digital health transformation in Europe: A focus on the role and experiences of Regional and Local Health Authorities

Brussels, 13th October 2022

Yesterday, the European Week of Regions and Cities, celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, opened the doors to an insightful discussion on realizing the potential of digital health transformation in Europe and the role of regional and local health authorities in driving this change. The session took place at the Committee of the Regions and was organised by the CoR's NAT Commission and Interregional Group on Health and Well-being, DG CONNECT from the European Commission, and EUREGHA, the reference network for European Regional and Local Health Authorities, gathering high-level members of European institutions, EU experts, and regional representatives across Europe. The wide participation (120+ participants between on-site and online) confirmed once again how digital innovation remains a top theme on the EU political agenda.

"The European Health Data Space is ambitious and will be a game changer. It is what will make the healthcare systems of the EU ready for the digital future." said Marco Marsella, Head of Unit 'eHealth, Well-Being and Ageing, DG CONNECT, adding: *"The evolution will be driven by the accessibility of data, and now we are delivering the tools to empower citizens to use data for their own benefit"*.

COVID-19 enhanced the value of digital health services beyond any expectations, being a key tool to stem its consequences. Fidelia Cascini, Digital health expert for Italy's Ministry of Health, brought the Italian example: *"The pandemic boosted the digitalization for vaccination and, since the pandemic, we have seen over 50% increase in the use of electronic records in our country. In this context, the EU Digital COVID Certificate was a great success because it was a shared model at the EU level"*. And on the EHDS: *"Data will allow the improvement of healthcare delivery, the increase of research capacity, the promotion of health industry innovation, the precision of health policymaking"*.

Birgitta Sacrédeus, Chair of Interregional Group on Health and Wellbeing and member of the NAT Commission at the CoR, stressed: *"Regions want a say in what is going to happen and feel that they are part of this European debate. Innovation is the key to sustainability in Europe, and regions and cities can work together for a digitalization that benefits citizens' health and wellbeing"*.

Digitalisation has the potential to improve effectiveness and efficiency in health care, which includes the fight against cancer. As Mike Morrissey, Chief Executive at the European Cancer Organisation, said: *"We are at a critical juncture in the digital health revolution. There is a shared understanding of the power of data and digital health solutions to advance cancer care. But obstacles remain. To make this a reality, it's time to address pressing challenges such as accessibility, data interoperability and digital literacy. We need to ensure that no one is left behind during this digital transformation"*. In this complex environment, the war in Ukraine has opened up additional scenarios, highlighting how digital solutions could prove essential to support Member States' and local health systems coping with exceptional health challenges and with the need to ensure the right to access to healthcare. Mr. Morrissey closed with a final message: *"We see this in very human terms. It's all about patient empowerment and trust between patient and doctor."*

Three video testimonials enriched the session by showcasing examples from the regional dimension. First, Flanders region (BE) presented the *ZorgAtlas*, a dynamic dashboard that allows the Flemish health and care agency to share and gather data across Belgian regions and communalities within Flanders. Then, Scotland (UK) showed its *“Approach to innovation in Health and Care”*, putting the spotlight on how stakeholders in Scotland are working together to improve the digital transformation process. Finally, a video from the EU-funded project *THALEA* was displayed as a reference example of innovation in the field of telemedicine.

Giovanni Gorgoni, Chair of EUREGHA and moderator of the session, concluded the event with a summarising thought: *“The digital transformation of health care is unavoidable, positively approaching it to fully exploit its potential is ‘our’ choice. Reinvention is the solution. The role of Regions, as the direct service relationship with citizens and users, will be crucial to promote the advantages of digitalisation, to manage the most appropriate literacy in this direction and to convey feedback bottom-up about the broader digital enablement of care processes.”*

For more information about this EWRC session, click [here](#).