Re-imagining Europe's health systems

PROGRAMME

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About

2025 marks a year of unparalleled geopolitical competition, with tariffs and trade wars as its opening acts. As the continent has adapted to new realities, from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to technological advancements and demographic shifts, the resilience and sustainability of its healthcare systems have become central to policy discussions.

The European Union faces the challenge of maintaining what was its global-leading position in innovation and competitiveness in the life sciences industry. The combined pressures of an ageing population, rising healthcare costs and barriers to equitable access to medicines complicate the situation; policymakers must address these factors in tandem to craft a more resilient healthcare system, which in turn supports a competitive economy.

At the beginning of this new institutional cycle, the European Commission has the opportunity to keep health systems at the heart of two crucial policy goals: maintain the strong European footprint in innovation and prosperity and ensure preparedness and resilience by taking full advantage of the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both policy goals are interconnected; with the focus on growth and competitiveness, the EU must also strive to ensure its economic agenda serves the social good. Citizens, as highlighted in the work of our citizen unit Debating Europe and in '10 policy choices for a Renewed Social Contract for Europe', are calling for a Europe where people can live, work and age in sustainable and healthy environments. By rising to the challenge and focusing on healthier people, we can build more resilient societies.

Maintaining the momentum of the digitalisation of healthcare offers a key opportunity. Ensuring effective implementation of the European Health Data Space will represent a unique asset for research and innovation, while digital systems will greatly improve patients' access to information and medicines.

In addition, the application of trustworthy, safe and high-quality artificial intelligence (AI) has already demonstrated its capacity to reinvent European health systems by improving workforce productivity, health outcomes and system efficiency. Unlocking the full potential of digitalisation will require to tackle issues such as workforce upskilling and data interoperability, as well as complex intellectual property ownership.

Compounding this is the impact of extreme weather events, which presents a growing threat to public health across Europe. The EU will need to integrate healthcare and climate strategies with sustainable urban planning while ensuring the healthcare sector reduces its environmental impact. The healthcare sector's significant environmental footprint – from energy consumption to waste production – undermines the sustainability of critical infrastructure.

Finally, workforce shortages, an ageing population placing increased pressure on healthcare demand and low levels of investment further exacerbate existing challenges, undermining the integration of European health systems and delaying essential care, particularly in regions struggling to attract and retain skilled workers. Without a robust and well-distributed healthcare workforce, achieving resilience remains an uphill battle, exposing vulnerabilities in emergency preparedness and long-term care delivery.

The 2025 Sustainable Livelihoods summit will address these systemic issues that lie at the heart of renewing Europe's social contract and underscore the urgent need for a unified and comprehensive approach to healthcare resilience, as well as boosting EU competitiveness, health sovereignty and autonomy by fostering collaboration among policymakers, industry leaders, patients' representatives and healthcare workers.

Join the *#SustainableLivelihoodsSummit* discussion on social media.

Schedule

WEDNESDAY 4 JUNE

19.00–21.30   POLICYMAKERS' DINNER DEBATE (by invitation only)

Governance matters for resilience – a stronger role for Europe in health

An off-the-record dinner debate for 30 senior stakeholders, including senior officials from the European Commission (from both cabinets and various directorates-general), members of the European Parliament, representatives from national and international institutions, the private sector, civil society and academics.

On the eve of the Sustainable Livelihoods Summit, we will consider the need for boldness and innovation in governance, as well as better financing and deeper EU-wide coordination to create a more integrated and resilient healthcare ecosystem, one that can balance the diversity of national contexts with the scale of the challenges facing the sector.

While the COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical gaps in European health systems, it also demonstrated the potential for a more cohesive and proactive EU response, where the European Commission was capable of promoting budgetary expansion, organising joint vaccine purchases and developing coordination tools to prepare for upcoming health crises. With the conception of the European Health Union to improve preparedness, enhance cross-border cooperation and ensure equitable access to care, funding gaps, regulatory fragmentation and political hesitancy continue to hinder progress. Despite these challenges, EU-led initiatives such as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and coordinated actions on rare diseases are important examples of areas where the EU has clearly provided great added value, shaping policies with a needs-driven approach for patients.

- What governance model does Europe need to build a truly integrated and resilient Health Union?
- How can the EU remove cross-border healthcare barriers and facilitate a coordinated digital transformation of European health systems while maintaining a system of shared competencies?
- How can funding mechanisms like the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) better support a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to health resilience?
- How can health system resilience contribute to European security?

#SustainableLivelihoodsSummit

Schedule

THURSDAY 5 JUNE

09.00–10.30   Registration and welcome coffee

09.30–10.20   PARALLEL ROUNDTABLES

The brave new world of health

Knowing what we know now about costs, improvements in healthcare, the pace of medical breakthroughs and how digital innovation and AI can reinvent the system - if we were to design a healthcare system that adapts, takes advantage of new opportunities and anticipates the challenges of the 21st century, how would we build it?

This set of parallel briefings will feature short and inspiring conversations.

10.30–11.45   SESSION I

Building blocks for an innovative and equitable Health Union

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, European health systems have been under heavy strain due to increased financial pressure and a challenging economic climate. At the onset of this institutional cycle, Europe faces the effects and intersection between long-standing challenges, such as health and social care workforce shortages, stagnating or even shrinking wages and an ageing population, and multiple competing political priorities. The current situation is thus drastically reducing policymakers' room for manoeuvre and hampering Europe's capacity to fully recover from the pandemic's effect on citizens' livelihoods.

The completion of the European Health Union represents a great opportunity to trigger a multiplying effect in health systems. Improving access to the most advanced treatments and reducing the barriers that currently separate national health systems will enable Europeans to fully benefit from the Single Market. In addition, supporting the healthcare innovation landscape, already a major source of R&D investments and patents in Europe, by reducing administrative burden and creating stable, consistent rules will drive industry competitiveness, making the business case for retaining manufacturing in Europe.

High-quality, citizen-centric care should be the north star of health policy in the institutional cycle. Strengthening innovation in the European life sciences sector will not only deliver improved long-term value to citizens' health and security but also serve as an economic driver for Europe. To develop a comprehensive strategy for the sector, Europe must balance its competitiveness goals with thorough assessments of citizens' health needs; this involves prioritising health promotion, raising health standards, reducing disease burdens and empowering individuals to take greater control over their health and wellbeing.

Schedule

- How can meaningful stakeholder alliances accelerate the shift from a disease-reactive model of care towards an ecosystem that proactively advocates for disease prevention and health promotion?

- How can healthcare innovation improve the long-term quality and accessibility of care?

- What are the missing steps to a patient-centred Health Union?

- How can Europe leverage its health sector to drive sustainable economic growth?

11.45–12.15   Coffee break

12.15–12.30   IDEA SHARING

Healthcare reimagined: sharing a vision for change

Europe's health ecosystem is operating under unprecedented challenges. With workforce shortages, complex regulatory frameworks, health inequities and barriers in health technology infrastructures among others – a disruptive reimagining of health in Europe is needed. How can we redefine the future of health and realise our vision for a healthier Europe?

Delivering a comprehensive approach to the Digital Single Market to transform Europe's health landscape

In recent years, the use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) in health has been lauded for its great potential in increasing efficiency, improving diagnosis and treatment and optimising resources amidst workforce challenges. Still, even with the European Commission's ambitions towards a Digital Single Market and meeting the targets for Europe's Digital Decade, there remain major barriers hindering the EU's ability to accelerate the implementation of solutions that effectively address unmet health needs across the continent.

As the EU aims to take a cross-cutting approach to strengthen capacity building and harness the power of digital technologies and AI to optimise clinical outcomes and save lives, EU leaders and innovators face the responsibility of deploying solutions that are both clinically safe, interoperable and environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, they must also be able to reconcile these technological innovations with keeping citizens at the heart of the digital transition – by aligning with the human aspects such as data governance, the digital divide, occupational burnout and

- Is the EU on a path towards digital health sovereignty and open strategic autonomy (OSA)?
- How can we re-design health systems in such a way that empowers people within a digital ecosystem?
- How can the EU reinforce a more proactive and integrated strategy for the European Health Data Space (EHDS) whilst complying with the EU AI Act?

13.30   End of summit

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Friends of Europe is a leading think-tank that connects people, stimulates debate and triggers change to create a more inclusive, sustainable and forward-looking Europe