

FOREWORD

Health systems in crisis, countering shockwaves and fatigue

This year's European Health Forum Gastein comes at a critical time, as we find our health systems confronted by a convergence of challenges.



Historical chronic underinvestment, an ageing health workforce, and while the post-pandemic recovery is ongoing, a number of geopolitical crises, including well over a year of full-scale war in Ukraine, increasing health needs of migrants and refugees, cost-of-living crisis and climate emergency, are contributing to an explosive cocktail.

But amid these challenges, there is light on the horizon. We are seeing an unprecedented level of interest in health and health systems among European countries, including at the highest political levels. And the fact that the Forum this year is shining a spotlight on these issues is a clear recognition of the need for us all to act. Indeed, we find hope in the collective determination to address these challenges head-on. The Forum serves as an essential platform to bring key stakeholders together to exchange ideas, share best practices, and come up with new solutions.

We at WHO/Europe, in consultation with our Member States, are reorienting our work toward rebuilding and strengthening health systems in the WHO European Region.

In March, we held a [first-ever forum on the well-being economy](#), then convened a regional meeting calling for [more and better support to and investment in our health workforce](#). The [Bucharest Declaration](#) adopted by more than 250 participants from 50 countries showed us that this issue needs action now.

In June, we held a [regional meeting on the future of hospitals](#) – noting especially the need to ensure a dual-track approach and re-orienting services to serve patients' and health professionals' needs – and, in September, we will be convening a [symposium on digital solutions](#), and issuing a report on how all 53 WHO/Europe Member States are adopting and adapting to new digital health technology.

Continuing the focus on health services and systems, October sees a regional primary health care meeting

ahead of [WHO/Europe's annual Regional Committee](#), and in December we will bring everything together to celebrate the [15th anniversary of the Tallinn Charter on health systems](#). The conference theme is 'trust and transformation', which reflects our view that while system transformation is needed to address the shockwaves and fatigue captured in the title of this year's Forum, we need people to transform systems. But this can only be done in a climate of trust and co-creation.

Only through concerted and united efforts can we enhance the capacity of health systems to respond to the diverse needs of our populations while safeguarding the well-being of our health and care workforce.

As we navigate this critical juncture, I am confident that our collective commitment and dedication to achieving health for all – the vision WHO charted 75 years ago – will serve as a rallying-call for a healthier and more prosperous future. In that regard, this year is a special one for us, as we mark the [announcement of the official collaboration between the European Health Forum Gastein and WHO/Europe](#) – a partnership of which I am personally proud. WHO/Europe has always been a firm supporter of the Forum and its community, and our recent work and achievements have shown that we are aligned in terms of our vision and objectives.

I extend my appreciation to Eurohealth and to the Forum for partnering on this special edition. Let us truly seize this moment in time to shape a healthier Europe, fortified all the better against crises, and resolute in building a better tomorrow for all our citizens.

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WHO Regional Director for Europe

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