

# GUEST EDITORIAL

Europe is in a state of permacrisis. COVID-19, the war that continues to rage in Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis, and the looming climate emergency are stretching health systems, and in particular the health and care workforce, to their limits. The European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) 2023 will explore solutions to the shockwaves that have hit health systems and discuss countermeasures to safeguard the fatigued health and care workforce. Health systems serve as a cornerstone of both a thriving society and economy. It is therefore key that they are well resourced, dependable, and steadfast in times of crisis.

In this issue of Eurohealth, one important aspect of reinforcing the resilience of European health systems is highlighted in Clemens Auer's urgent call to safeguard welfare systems and solidarity as our unique – and crucial – European values. He argues that sustainable funding will be key to support health and welfare systems following the recent shockwaves they have had to counter.

Thomas Zapata and co-authors address health workforce shortages in their article “From Great Attrition to Great Attraction: Countering the great resignation of health and care workers” and urge for action to explore solutions to retain and attract health workers. Solutions need to consider the changing labour market with different expectations of work, an ageing workforce, and mobility and migration leading to acute shortages and uneven distribution of healthcare professionals.

The first EHFG topic track, “Innovation for a resilient future”, will look at the transformative potential of innovative solutions for the challenges we face and shed light on the controversies that surround them. In their article, Madda Henry Magbity et al. are advocating an ambitious One Health approach to counter antimicrobial resistance. To truly advance in battling the silent pandemic, the authors point to the need for multisectoral European Union policy actions and ensuring prevention efforts are equally adopted across the human, animal, and environment sectors.

The necessity to build health systems that will not only withstand shocks, but have the flexibility to anticipate, adapt, and respond to emerging crises is explored in the EHFG topic track “Building shock-proof health systems”.

The Joint Action JADECARE reinforces the capacity of health authorities to successfully address important aspects of health system transformation. In their article, Ane Fullaondo Zabala et al. highlight

the importance of best practice transfer between EU Member States to foster digitally enabled integrated care.

In his article on the crisis of health systems in Southern and Eastern European countries, John Yfantopoulos draws attention to the lack of public spending on health, exacerbated by the current crises, and urgently calls for action to redress the imbalance in health between European citizens.

The EU Mission on Cancer has set the very ambitious target to improve the lives of more than three million people by 2030. In their article “Boosting mental health of young cancer survivors”, Dirk Handrich and Joanna Drake point to the support and adapted approaches needed to improve the mental health and quality of life of young cancer patients and survivors. This requires not only an involvement of young patients in policy development, but also a societal change to improve the understanding of young cancer patients’ needs.

In her article on climate and health, Catherine Guinard calls for more research on the profound impact of climate change on health, specifically on Europe’s most marginalised populations. These under-represented communities are impacted both by the worsening of existing health problems, as well as exacerbated challenges in accessing care.

Dheepa Rajan and colleagues present the importance of primary healthcare (PHC) as a foundation of health system resilience and health security. Their article outlines the specific impact PHC has on addressing community needs, eventually leading to better outcomes and serving as a protector against future health shocks.

The crises we are currently facing have brought health to the forefront of the EU’s political agenda and led to ambitious policy efforts towards a European Health Union. At the EHFG 2023, we will discuss how to uphold these advancements and maintain the momentum for an encompassing union for health, featured in the track “Health policy at a crossroads”.

National public health institutes play a special role in maintaining the resilience of health systems. To foster future Health for All Policies, Herwig Ostermann introduces novel roles and mandates and the need for new strategic partnerships to address the challenges and learnings from COVID-19, conflicts, and global economic shocks.

With these “tasters” of this year’s EHFG topics, we invite you to discuss how to ride out the current shockwaves and how crises can help catalyse the development of new approaches to health system problems. Following positive policy developments on the European level with all actors working towards a true European Health Union, we will discuss and collect “health asks” in view of the European elections taking place in June 2024 to ensure that health will be kept high on European priority lists, despite—or because of—the shockwaves that health systems have had to counter.



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