

EUROPE SHOULD FILL THE GAP AND EXERCISE LEADERSHIP IN HEALTH RESEARCH

It is time to coordinate health research efforts across Europe through the implementation of a European Health Research Council

Brussels, 9 July 2020

Dear President von der Leyen,

Dear Commissioner Gabriel,

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

Health is a fundamental right of all Europeans and a collective responsibility within the European Union (EU). In addition, there is broad consensus that health is one of the most important elements contributing to a vibrant economy. The experience of the last three months with the COVID-19 pandemic is abundant evidence of this.

The fight to save lives and reduce the immediate impact of the crisis has called into action governments, EU institutions, the health care sector, scientists and society. Concrete results include fast-track support and investment into research and developments to enhance diagnosis, treatment and prevention of COVID-19. We are all grateful for the enormous efforts that have been made.

Other lessons that emerge from this real-life experience are the global interdependence of health and the power of coordinated responses, as opposed to the disastrous consequences of fragmentation across EU member states. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted Europe's strength in health research but also its weaknesses when it comes to a coordinated response for health policy, strategy and research. The crisis provides a unique opportunity for the European Commission to put in place coordinating instruments and mechanisms embedded in a "European Council for Health Research".

With respect to the post-crisis recovery strategy: it should create resilience and preparedness for future crises, and secure public and global health in an economically viable and competitive Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the value of excellent health research and its translation into health care solutions. Research is not a tool that can be used when needed and returned to the shelf. The response to health challenges requires prior planning and a long-term commitment based on a comprehensive vision, focused on societal values and guided by stakeholder input.

We are happy to read that the European Commission will launch a new stand-alone Health Programme and that Horizon Europe will be reinforced to fund vital research in health. The missing link in the European Commission's proposal is a much-needed visionary leadership for health and health research in Europe. This should include a credible body responsible for designing and implementing a roadmap for health research and for linking newly acquired knowledge to a pan-European health policy. The alternative, fragmentation, prevents high-quality initiatives within our EU institutions across member states from being realised. In addition, a duplication of identical efforts at the national level leads to waste of much needed funding for health and missed opportunities for enhancing synergies.

As such, a dedicated body for health research, in the form of a "European Health Research Council", must be set-up as part of an EU commitment to the implementation of a Health Union. A multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder council should set out a comprehensive vision and a strategy based on scientific approaches and evidence for the successful implementation of this concept. People-centred, excellent biomedical research and translation into medical practice will provide the framework for policy making for better health.

There are several pressing arguments that demonstrate the need to foster and develop health research at the EU level including, but not limited to:

1. Persistent health inequalities in Europe are not acceptable and require a health delivery roadmap and pan-European research facilitating systems in addition to those that can currently be provided at member state level.
2. Health data create a wealth of opportunities amplified by innovations in the digital space. Only a collective cross-border approach can mine that potential efficiently and with agility in times of crisis.
3. Health, like a virus, does not respect borders. Health research needs a global and coordinated vision that is open to the world and promotes a holistic 'One Health' approach. The EU is well-placed to lead this endeavour, both within its borders and beyond.

Excellent European Commission programs already support impactful cross-border collaborative projects, as demonstrated in the current COVID crisis. They set the example, but we must move on. The European Commission only manages a small fraction of the total public research investments in Europe. Reinforcing the synergy of initiatives across member states and a new model for agile, impactful collaborations are crucial. We need smart funding guided by a European vision and a strategic health research agenda.

This call for visionary leadership for health and health research is firmly embedded in EU priorities: more efficient, people-centred health research as part of a durable economy built around social values and with respect for the planet.

We therefore sincerely hope that the Commission considers the launch of a "European Health Research Council", to be able to capitalise on Europe's excellent research and to be better prepared for health threats now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

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Biomedical Alliance in Europe (BioMed Alliance)

BioMed Alliance is a non-profit organisation representing 33 leading European research and medical societies uniting more than 400,000 researchers and healthcare professionals.



European Academy of Paediatrics

The European Academy of Paediatrics promotes the health of children and young people in Europe.



EU Health Coalition

The EU Health Coalition is a multi-stakeholder initiative looking at mapping the future of healthcare in Europe in order to make the most of the innovation at our fingertips, at the role of the European Union in addressing the challenges we face and critically at how can different sectors converge to deliver the best outcomes for patients in Europe.



Federation of European Academies of Medicine (FEAM)

FEAM is the European umbrella group of national Academies of Medicine and Medical Sections of Academies of Sciences. It brings together 21 national Academies representing over 5000 among the best biomedical scientists in Europe.

