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Health, and the Renewed Social Contract

BRIEFING PAPER



Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 and the pandemic has fundamentally rewritten the rules of the game on geopolitics, trade, globalisation, and most fundamentally, what we understand to be the purpose of health systems in Europe. The pandemic's ability to wreak havoc on every system has been unimaginable, from the ability of governments and localities to deal with the incidence of ill health and the closure of the economy, to the intra-operability of public and private systems to cope and adapt to a health crisis. The pandemic has brought into question decades of how health care has developed and the delineation of the role of the state, private sector and citizens. It has called into question the current social contract.

A social contract refers to the basic agreement forged between citizens and those who govern. In the EU, democratically elected governments use the contributions of taxpayers to provide specific public services and social benefits, such as infrastructure, security, healthcare and education. In today's market economy, characterised by rapidly evolving digital technologies, globalisation, as well as unprecedented health, geopolitical and environmental challenges, the social contract between the EU and its citizens is overripe for renewal. Previous models – whether based on New Deal or neoliberal economic policies – are no longer fit for purpose. Engaging citizens with European political processes, Friends of Europe believes social dialogue is the cornerstone on which to fulfil the promise of social progress embedded in the EU treaties and articulated via a Renewed Social Contract.

A healthier social contract

The Union's aim is to promote the wellbeing of its peoples. The role and responsibilities of the EU in doing so will be a leading area for reflection within the framework of a Renewed Social Contract.

The COVID-19 crisis brought home many truths. As the pandemic spread, the strengths and weaknesses of European health systems and the inequalities between countries, regions and groups of people were revealed. It also showed the importance of health to a well-functioning, stable Europe, uncovering the close links between health status, and economic and social progress.

Europe must meet citizen demands to live healthy, well and with dignity in a just union that improves public health, prevents illness and disease, and supports health information and education.

Throughout 2022, Friends of Europe held a number of strategically curated activities that address some of Europe's health priorities. Each distinct event shared the overarching strategic objectives of Friends of Europe, tied with the common threads of dialogue and reflection to inform a robust and sustainable Renewed Social Contract in the domain of health.

Strategic autonomy for the supply and manufacture of medication

“Where innovation happens matters – for jobs, resilience and economic growth, as well as to patients and healthcare systems across the EU

Cristian Silviu Buşoi, Chair of the European Parliament’s Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)

In March 2022, a debate around building strategic independence for the European pharmaceutical industry gathered participants from research, health economics, industry and the European institutions to consider the challenges and opportunities for sustaining and growing the European pharmaceutical sector and maintaining robust supply of essential medicines. An emphasis was placed on improving harmonisation, as well as around reporting and monitoring existing and potential problems. It addressed industrial policies, trade flow, and the move to smart procurement. Creating an EU-wide list of medicines with harmonised definitions and procedures for medicine shortages and reporting criteria will challenge inequalities of opportunity by promoting a coordinated process across the territory. Recommendations for a common industrial strategy that increases support for regional initiatives seek to reframe Europe’s role in the world while promoting new leadership.

“Where innovation happens matters – for jobs, resilience and economic growth, as well as to patients and healthcare systems across the EU,”– said **Cristian Silviu Buşoi**, Chair of the European Parliament’s Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE).

Leading the way on antimicrobial resistance

An event on seizing the opportunity for European leadership on antibiotic development and access explored Europe’s role in the global effort to secure antimicrobial supply. The November debate, held with high-level policymakers, health experts, industry, scientists and patient advocates, confirmed that EU political momentum is strong to facilitate innovative research and development through incentive programmes and reformed regulatory pathways.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will benefit from these schemes, promoting new

leadership in the fight against antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Strong EU commitment to addressing this issue coupled with international cooperation reframes Europe's role in the world by assuming a leadership position in ensuring that effective antimicrobial agents remain available. Improving access helps in challenging inequalities of opportunity.

Data-driven health solutions

A discussion on the future of the European Health Data Space (EHDS) was held in October 2022. The event, hosted as part of Friends of Europe's What the Chief Says series, was the occasion to explore EHDS opportunities and challenges. Claire Bury, Deputy Director-General at the European Commission-Directorate General for Health and Food Safety, discussed the potential of the EuropeanHDS to support epidemiology, prevention, diagnostics, research and treatments. More robust, granular data will challenge inequalities of opportunity by clarifying the impact of social and economic determinants of health. Protecting patient privacy must be balanced with giving citizens appropriate control over their data. The rare disease patient community has demonstrated that citizens are ready to harness their data to forward research and solutions. The vital role of health data will need to be clarified in the Renewed Social Contract.

Preventing ill-health and improving population health

"It's cost-effective to focus on prevention. We are investing in our public health," remarked **Dr Hans Bruyninckx**, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency.

The need to re-focus health and other systems on prevention and health promotion is fundamental to making health systems financially sustainable and to allow Europe's peoples to live well. Within a Renewed Social Contract, governments, citizens and private industry will have a role to play in identifying, promoting and adopting changes that lower risk factors and reduce health inequalities. Friends of Europe focused on areas where ill-health can be prevented.

“ It's cost-effective to focus on prevention. We are investing in our public health

Dr Hans Bruyninckx, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency

Europe's leading cause of death and how to prevent it

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), primarily heart attack and stroke, is the leading cause of death and preventable illness in Europe, affecting over 60mn people and straining local, national and European health budgets. A Friends of Europe debate on cardiovascular health in a changed and changing world, held in partnership with the European Alliance for Cardiovascular Health (EACH) and supported by the MEP Heart Group, brought together policymakers, researchers, health professionals and citizens in May 2022 to discuss how progress can be made. The EACH alliance unveiled its European strategy for cardiovascular health (CVH) based upon a coordinated approach to prevention, screening, management, research, best practices and data. "The EACH Action Plan for Cardiovascular Health provides a structure and strategy to tackle the problem in a coordinated way," said **Stephan Achenbach**, President of the European Society of Cardiology.

The participants also looked to Spain's innovative CVH strategy, which looks at the whole-of-society responsibility in disease prevention, along with streamlined and equitable screening and treatment. "We have shifted our strategy's philosophy, moving from disease to health, from patients to citizens," said **Dr Héctor Bueno**, Scientific Coordinator of Estrategia en Salud Cardiovascular (ESCAV), the new Spanish national strategy for cardiovascular health.

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Stephan Achenbach, President of the European Society of Cardiology

"Across Europe, we know the impact and prevalence of CVDs, which have a notably higher death rate in central and eastern Europe," commented **Stella Kyriakides**, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety at the event. Regional inequalities and the social gradient in health is clear in CVD incidence and health; addressing CVD effectively will give more people the opportunity to contribute to the economy and civic life. A Renewed Social Contract will call on national and regional governments to learn from each other, sharing national and regional strategies.

New digital technologies integrated throughout the care pathway to share data and knowledge, facilitate research and implement preventive measures throughout the territory will allow EU countries to meet the challenge of CVD, reframing Europe's role in the world.

Beating cancer and cleaning up the environment

“ It is good to emphasise the co-benefits for the environment and for health care

Jane Burston, Executive Director of the Clean Air fund and 2015-2016 European Young Leader (EYL40)

Pollutant exposure is responsible for an estimated 10% of all cancer cases in Europe, the majority of which are preventable. The Friends of Europe debate on beating cancer with better environments, held in June 2022 was the occasion to discuss a new European Environment Agency report, entitled 'Beating cancer — the role of Europe's environment'. Policymakers, health experts and environmental advocates reflected on collaborative strategies. Certain cancers can be reduced through leveraging environmental policies, such as the European Green Deal, the EU 2021 Zero Pollution Action Plan and the Chemical Strategy for Sustainability. These opportunities for action bolster a green transformation while improving public health. A cleaner Europe will be a healthier, more equitable Europe.

“It is good to emphasise the co-benefits for the environment and for health care,” said **Jane Burston**, Executive Director of the Clean Air fund and 2015-2016 European Young Leader (EYL40).

The poorest communities are most impacted by pollution-linked diseases and certain countries may need support to transition away from pollutants. Efforts to reduce environmental pollutions and related cancers will challenge inequalities of opportunity. To convince policymakers that reducing pollutants will have a positive impact on citizen well-being and future health budgets, evidence needs to be more widely shared. It will be essential to encourage all players to take action to reduce cancer pollutants. Citizens and health professionals are leading advocacy in the field, while horizontal and vertical collaboration between layers of government is a crucial piece of the puzzle.

“ To achieve lasting change in Europe, we need to choose the right moment to introduce impactful measures into the political agenda

Dr Alexander Simidchiev, Member of the Bulgarian National Assembly

How will the Renewed Social Contract address the environmental ceiling to reduce the European cancer burden linked to pollution? Prevention, health and environmental literacy, evidence sharing and addressing inequalities in disease burdens and pollution are elements to bring to the table when discussing new policies. Progress can be

achieved through a combination of evidence, good practices and seizing the occasion for change by leveraging environmental policies.

“To achieve lasting change in Europe, we need to choose the right moment to introduce impactful measures into the political agenda,” noted **Dr Alexander Simidchiev**, Member of the Bulgarian National Assembly.

Can Europe keep innovating? The European Health Innovation Summit

The health programme’s flagship event was the moment to fully align and kickstart work on health and the Renewed Social Contract up to 2030. Friends of Europe’s Health Innovation Summit – ‘reimagining health systems: green, agile and citizen-centred’ gathered citizens, policymakers and experts on 29 November 2022 to explore how the spirit of social, policy and practical innovation seen during the pandemic can be maintained to address future challenges and changes. The summit looked at three key shifts: the changing role of citizens in health; health and the green transition; and an ageing Europe. The conclusion was clear that more engaged citizens is key for the future of our health systems.

Looking at the changing role of citizens in health, participants highlighted the importance of health literacy and digital skills for citizens, practitioners and private companies. They discussed how the value of patient engagement has been demonstrated in the field of rare diseases and that this model can be extrapolated to other fields.

On health and the green transition, the summit found that mainstreaming the ‘green agenda’ can be part of the reorientation to community-based, preventive models; this will deliver better care and reduce the need for primary, secondary and tertiary care – which will reduce the environmental footprint of the health system. In addition, shallow intervention can already be implemented to reduce emissions from health care.

Discussions on the implications of an ageing population brought together parallel discussions on health on the one hand, and long term-care on the other, one week before the European Council recommendations on the latter were adopted. Participants appreciated the opportunity to take a holistic view of the two systems and the benefits of better collaboration between them. Discussions focused on the need to re-focus on extending healthy life years over extending life expectancy, and the need to keep people well so that more intensive health care can be used when it is most needed and most effective; reducing non-communicable diseases will be crucial to reaching this goal. The summit discussed who is responsible for care, namely the balance of responsibility and rights between individuals, families and the state, as well as the impact of ‘who cares’ and the skills of carers on labour market participation and economies. The need to innovate processes and systems to allow the right treatment to be delivered was another key conclusion.

Conclusion

Throughout 2022, Friends of Europe curated events on critical health topics that generated forward-looking discussions on Europe's leading health challenges and opportunities. The Friends of Europe events stimulated rich reflection on the strategies needed to sustain a healthier, more equitable Europe within the context of the Renewed Social Contract.

Some of the overarching themes that emerged from the discussions – equity, innovation, strong policies and solid partnerships – can drive future discussions on how to shape a robust, sustainable Renewed Social Contract. In the words of Brando Benifei MEP, Co-Chair of the MEP Heart Group: “A healthier European Union is a better European Union.”

Friends of Europe

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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.

