



European Health Summit: innovation in health for a brighter future



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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic showcased the need for all stakeholders from both the private and public sectors to work together in a transparent way and join forces with the shared objective of improving public health and delivering to citizens.

On the occasion of the European Health Summit hosted by Friends of Europe on 10 October 2023 in Brussels, held under the theme 'innovation in health for a brighter future', speakers reminded the audience that health matters and reflected on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The summit convened participants from various sectors, including civil society, governments, EU institutions, and industry. During a series of lively parallel roundtables and interactive debates, speakers proposed recommendations on health for the European Commission's next mandate, which begins in 2024.



Cartoon by Menah Wellen

Key conclusions

- In the next European Commission mandate, a commissioner who is responsible for the ‘well-being economy’ should be appointed at the vice-president level. This position could bring together aspects of health, sustainable development and economics.
- The next Commission should continue to support innovation with the objective of ensuring that innovative medicines and treatments are made available to all, particularly the most vulnerable groups, as well as to address future pandemics and other public health challenges. It should also partner more closely and transparently with pharmaceutical companies so that newer drugs are made available for pandemics and other conditions to ensure that all EU citizens have equal access to healthcare treatment. Vaccination should also be accessible to all; in this regard, the EU executive should establish a public vaccination campaign to address the flu and COVID-19 that targets the most vulnerable groups.
- The recruitment of healthcare workers from abroad is a common practice in the EU to address healthcare shortages, however, the EU should ensure effective health workforce planning by investing in the development of the domestic workforce through the promotion of digital tools and literacy.
- The European Commission has proposed the European Health Data Space (EHDS) in order to support individuals in taking control of their own health data and to support the use of health data for better research and healthcare delivery. Additionally, on 26 April 2023, the Commission adopted the proposal for a new directive and regulation, replacing the existing legislation (Directive 2001/83/EC and Regulation 726/2004), with the main objectives of ensuring that patients have timely access to affordable medicines in the EU and continuing the development of innovative and environmentally medicines in Europe. In order to ensure timely and speedy adoption, stronger and more permanent funding is needed on the EU level to address the differences between members states. Moreover, the transparency directive could be revised to ensure much clearer and more simple rules in terms of the reimbursement of medicines and services in light of cross-border healthcare.
- The next Commission should draw up a plan for cardiovascular diseases and consider how to better allocate existing funds for the prevention of diseases and the improvement of public health.
- The EU needs to embrace AI whilst mitigating the digital divide for vulnerable populations and rural communities by addressing infrastructural problems and promoting digital literacy.

It's ok not to be ok

Held on the occasion of World Mental Health Day on 10 October, an [idea-sharing session](#) with **Francesca Cavallo**, bestselling author of “Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls”, Founder & CEO of Undercats and 2019 European Young Leader (EYL40), was an opportunity to discuss mental health as a universal right, highlighting some of the culture-based obstacles that stand in the way of giving this issue the importance it deserves. For example, Cavallo noted that “40% of men say that they have never spoken to anybody about their mental health.”

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Francesca Cavallo, bestselling author of “Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls”, Founder & CEO of Undercats and 2019 European Young Leader (EYL40)

Health as an investment

Investing in health innovation does not merely save lives, it improves the quality of lives. Yet, in the last 15 years, there has been a disinvestment in health.

This is a “sociological phenomenon”, commented moderator **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Spokesperson at Friends of Europe. “Why would politicians ignore quality of health, knowing there is a real connection between quality of health and economic growth?”

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic showed what can be achieved when there is a collaborative practice. “How can we transform the energy that came about through adversity to overcome boundaries and borders? How do you bottle that energy that came through adversity to actually do the most remarkable things?” asked Kanani.

Financial sustainability

Providing an overview of what Italy was doing at the national level, **Fabiana Brigante**, Legal Officer for the Secretary General of the Italian Ministry of Health, explained that Italy is strengthening the research sector by funding “proof of concept projects with a low degree of technological maturity.” This includes updating technological equipment in hospitals and strengthening technological infrastructure.



1. **Anca Toma**, Executive Director of the European Patients' Forum
2. **Fabiana Brigante**, Legal Officer for the Secretary General of the Italian Ministry of Health; **Andrea Corazza**, Senior Director of Government Affairs & Policy for Europe at Novavax
3. **Francesca Cavallo**, bestselling author of "Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls", Founder & CEO of Undercats and 2019 European Young Leader (EYL40)
4. *From left to right:* **Fabiana Brigante**, **Andrea Corazza**, **Jakub Dvořáček**, **Andrea Rappagliosi**, **Nina Rawal** and **Anca Toma**
5. **Jakub Dvořáček**, Czech Deputy Minister for Health



Jakub Dvořáček, Czech Deputy Minister for Health, questioned the return from investing in health. He explained that his country has increased its health budget by 10% every last three years. “Do we get 30% back through the health of the population?” the minister asked. “Not really.”

While there have been large investments both on the national and EU levels to improve both healthcare services and access to innovative tools, Dvořáček added that “we have to understand how to invest the money in healthcare.”

The minister explained that the secondary use of health data is not solely the “holy grail” for research but also vital to understand whether these investments bring both social and economic returns.

“ We have to understand how to invest the money in healthcare ”

Jakub Dvořáček, Czech Deputy Minister for Health

Anca Toma, Executive Director of the European Patients’ Forum, asked whether health should be seen in economic terms. “If it is, I want to behave like a shareholder in the health system,” she commented. “If it is about costs, we need to remember that citizens are shareholders of the health system as taxpayers, and we should have a seat at the table.”

“ We need to remember that citizens are shareholders of the health system as taxpayers, and we should have a seat at the table. ”

Anca Toma, Executive Director of the European Patients’ Forum

Making the case for public-private partnerships, **Andrea Rappagliosi**, Senior Vice-President for EMEA, Canada and LATAM at Edwards Lifesciences, said they are “the only available enabler we have today to make best use of available innovation to transform healthcare and have better outcomes.”

Rappagliosi noted that if Europe is spending €282 billion a year to treat cardiovascular diseases, it should have a coherent European plan for cardiovascular diseases. “Look at the money that we are wasting, and let’s do a better work,” he insisted.

“ We need to encourage innovation, but we can’t break the bank ”

Nina Rawal, Partner and Co-Head at Trill Impact Ventures and 2014 European Young Leader (EYL40)

“We need to encourage innovation, but we can’t break the bank,” said **Nina Rawal**, Partner and Co-Head at Trill Impact Ventures and 2014 European Young Leader (EYL40). There needs to be financial sustainability and she noted that “blindly raising prices for innovation is frankly unsustainable.”

“For the vast majority of innovation, coming to the market is incremental,” Rawal mentioned and went on to advocate for further discussion on the topic.

Harnessing a spirit of collaboration

Speakers acknowledged that collaboration, as seen throughout the pandemic, could bring about successful outcomes. “During the pandemic, there was an alignment of intent that was powerful and enabled us to get vaccines available quickly,” remarked Andrea Corazza, Senior Director of Government Affairs & Policy for Europe at Novavax. He warned that cooperation “is not happening at the same level as the pandemic” and argued that “we need to take these lessons and apply them to more standard and non-emergency situations.”

“If Europe can unite, we can improve health outcomes across the world

Andrea Corazza, Senior Director of Government Affairs & Policy for Europe at Novavax

“We need to improve innovation and share research and we cannot work alone,” insisted Brigante. Rawal highlighted the benefits of greater collaboration: “If Europe can unite, we can improve health outcomes across the world and also business opportunities for companies and people.”

More investment

“The fact COVID is over doesn’t mean COVID isn’t still here,” Corazza mentioned, adding that COVID is still “a serious health threat”. He called for more work to be done with pharmacies and GPs to allow people to be vaccinated when it is convenient for them. Moreover, Corazza highlighted that decades of previously conducted research allowed COVID-19 vaccines to be available so quickly during the pandemic, emphasising the importance of continuing to invest in the long-term management of diseases.



1. **Nina Rawal**, Partner and Co-Head at Trill Impact Ventures and European Young Leader (EYL40)
2. **Andrea Rappagliosi**, Senior Vice-President of Public Affairs for EMEA, Canada, and Latam at Edwards Lifesciences
3. **Maya Matthews**, Acting Director of Digital, EU4Health and Health Systems Modernisation at the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE)
4. **Ridwaan Jhetam**, Senior Vice-President and Head of Worldwide Medical Affairs Hematology at Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS)
5. *From left to right: Maya Matthews, Ridwaan Jhetam, Nasreen Anjum-Malik, Ricardo Baptista Leite and Tomislav Sokol*



Digitalisation of healthcare systems

WITH

Nasreen Anjum-Malik
Dutch Cancer Society (RINP)

Ricardo Baptista Leite
HEALTH AI & European
Young Leader (EYL40)

Ridwaan Jhetam
Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS)

Maya Matthews
European Commission
Directorate-General
Health and Food Safety

Tomislav Sokol
European Parliament

12.30
13.30

Toma underlined the importance of investing in health education and health literacy. “In order to trust science, people need to trust the scientific process and deal with the disinformation,” she insisted. “This is a significant investment, but if you want your return, that’s where you start.”

In response, Rawal noted that we need to be thinking about new financing models to deliver care. “It’s not astrophysics. It’s about aligning incentives and delivering SDG3 for the citizens of Europe and beyond.”

Digitalisation of healthcare systems

While the EU recognises that digitalisation increases the capacity of healthcare systems to deliver more personalised care, it is important to consider how to improve digital health with a people-centred approach.

When it comes to digitalisation, “COVID was a natural experiment,” explained **Maya Matthews**, Acting Director of Digital, EU4Health and Health Systems Modernisation at the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE). She highlighted that whilst this digitalisation has pervaded in some European countries, others are “building on it, some rolled back, and some didn’t even start.”

“ AI is reshaping early detection and treatment of cancer

Ridwaan Jhetam, Senior Vice-President and Head of Worldwide Medical Affairs Hematology at Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS)

The benefits of digitalisation are multiple. “COVID expedited telehealth and allows us to bridge the cancer gap for unrepresented groups that are living in remote locations across Europe,” argued Ridwaan Jhetam, Senior Vice-President and Head of Worldwide Medical Affairs Hematology at Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS). He added that telepathology will “allow faster turnaround times and quicker movement of treatment of cancer patients”, whilst leveraging AI will “reduce the variability of early detection and ensure better treatment decisions for cancer patients.”

“AI is reshaping early detection and treatment of cancer,” Jhetam indicated. “Computational power can lead to scaling up of treatments such as self-therapy.”

The brave new world of health

During a roundtable before the summit's main sessions, **Björn Schuller**, Professor of Artificial Intelligence at Imperial College London, stressed the importance of patients trusting AI. "The system should work equally well for everybody," he insisted. "Regulation has to prevent AI from doing the things it shouldn't do," he noted, stressing that most doctors are "quite open to take it on".

“ AI-powered precision medicine can change the way we treat cancer

Nasreen Anjum-Malik, Policy and Strategic Advisor at the Dutch Cancer Society (KWF)

A parallel roundtable led by **Eva Rennen**, Co-Founder and COO at Nostics, looked at how next-gen diagnostics can help the global healthcare system respond to climate change and the spread of resistant pathogens. A roundtable led by **Tom Verstraeten**, Professor at the Robotics Research Group of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), examined the challenges posed by the use of robotics in healthcare systems.

Nasreen Anjum-Malik, Policy and Strategic Advisor at the Dutch Cancer Society (KWF), noted that there could be benefits in digitalising basic medical records and extracting data to catalyse research and move towards personalised treatment options for cancer. "AI-powered precision medicine can change the way we treat cancer," she said, explaining that "if we have more data accessible and we use AI to analyse it, we might identify more specific mutations in cancer cells that we could act upon."

Tackling the digital divide

Matthews admitted that she is worried that we will create a digital divide. The EU official expressed concern that " swathes" of EU citizens "don't have digital health literacy"; this is one of the key issues for the WHO. Failing to tackle this issue risks giving rise to a "two-tier health system", she warned.

“ We have a tremendous digital divide

Ricardo Baptista Leite, CEO of HEALTH.AI and 2015-2016 European Young Leader (EYL40)

Ricardo Baptista Leite, CEO of HEALTH.AI and 2015-2016 European Young Leader (EYL40), agreed with Matthews but suggested that the problem is already in the here and now. “We have a tremendous digital divide,” he stated, explaining how the further away people live from the hospital, the more likely they do not have a phone. “All this needs to be addressed.”

Empower patients

The role of patients in the decision-making process was a prominent theme in the discussion. Jhetam remarked that it is important to ensure cancer patients are empowered through access to their data and greater awareness about the treatment and screening options that are available to them.

On data collection, Anjum-Malik argued there is a need to ensure that citizens are informed in order to “help them see the potential and how this will benefit their health [...] Otherwise, we’re holding back what they can benefit from in the future.”

Matthews called for different types of partnerships where “patients and public health professionals are around the table”.

The way forward for the European Health Data Space

The European Commission proposed to set up the European Health Data Space (EHDS), which Matthews describes as a “way to create a framework for information and data to travel.” The EHDS will enable patients’ medical records to be accessed across the EU so that doctors in all EU member states have access to the same information. This is an “audacious and bold plan” in Matthews’ view.

Tomislav Sokol, Member of the European Parliament, rapporteur on the EHDS and shadow rapporteur on the Revision of the EU pharmaceutical legislation, mentioned that when it comes to agreeing on the EHDS, “secondary use is the big elephant in the room [...] The controversy is who can use this data for what and the patients’ role. This is the big fight.” He proposed, as a compromise, an “opt-out” provision that would enable patients to ensure that their data is not used.

“ Secondary use is the big elephant in the room

Tomislav Sokol, Member of the European Parliament, rapporteur on the EHDS and shadow rapporteur on the Revision of the EU pharmaceutical legislation

Conclusion

Globally, health became the top priority for all world leaders during the pandemic, therefore it is important to heed the lessons learned from that period. When the pandemic began, it forced the EU to break with the past and take a centralised approach to health policies with industry, the medical profession and decision-makers coming together around the common goal of protecting and vaccinating citizens.

That era is now behind us and actors are reverting to their old ways, exemplified recently by President von der Leyen's State of the Union speech in September, during which health was not mentioned once.

This year's European Health Summit has helped to re-focus minds on what worked before and what can work again. Recommendations to the new Commission include ensuring that health is present in all policies whilst respecting the environment. A European Commissioner at the vice-president level that is responsible for the 'well-being economy' would be a welcome first step. More broadly, the EU institutions need to strengthen their support for innovation and use their convening power to bring back key players around the table – as happened during the pandemic.

Each citizen must have easy and equal access to health treatments, regardless of their economic background or geography. This is where digitalisation and AI can be a game-changer for health treatment, but they also bring inherent risks, as largely untried technologies in many areas of the sector. Most importantly, no one should be left behind as a result of these new technologies.

This year's European Health Summit served as an opportunity for stakeholders to share recommendations aimed at reshaping the future of healthcare and thereby contributing to the [Renewed Social Contract](#).

The event not only shed light on the challenges ahead but also emphasised the importance of collaboration, innovation and sustained investment in healthcare to improve the future of public health in Europe.



1. **Maya Matthews**, Acting Director of Digital, EU4Health and Health Systems Modernisation at the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE); **Ridwaan Jhetam**, Senior Vice-President and Head of Worldwide Medical Affairs Hematology at Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS); **Nasreen Anjum-Malik**, Policy and Strategic Advisor at the Dutch Cancer Society (KWF); **Ricardo Baptista Leite**, CEO of HEALTH.AI and European Young Leader (EYL40)
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