

Feedback on HERA Consultation by the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health

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In our recent opinion on The Organisation of Resilient Health and Social Care Following the COVID-19 Pandemic¹, the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health (EXPH) recommended “that research and development, such as for innovative medicines (e.g. vaccines), and stock keeping for existing therapies and personal protective equipment should be more grounded in strategic preparedness for new challenges, including pandemics, in order to increase resilience. This requires new systems for R&D, on one hand, and production and sales, on the other.”

In particular, the evidence that we reviewed suggests that the existing EU capabilities deserve further investment, as they are sub-optimal with respect to:

- developing, manufacturing and deploying medical countermeasures (e.g. vaccines, antitoxins, antibiotics, chemical antidotes, antiviral drugs, personal protective equipment, medical devices, etc.) aimed at combating serious cross-border threats to health
- for anticipatory public health threat and risk assessments at EU level (including global threats)
- modelling and foresight of serious cross-border threats to health at EU level (including global threats)

Furthermore, EU instruments for research, innovation and development of medical countermeasures and for access and deployment of medical countermeasures (e.g. Horizon Europe, European Innovation Council, European Regional Development Fund, the European Defence Fund) are also sub-optimal.

We note that our concerns are shared and are already being adopted, within the constraints of the existing legal framework, as the Commission shifts to a more interventionist approach, with elements that point to the gradual emergence of a sustainable European Pillar of Social Rights and a European industrial strategy.²

Several changes are needed:

- 1) Consistent with the vision of a European Health Union, Member States, working with the European institutions, should explicitly prioritise health as a human right, as a driver of economic growth, as a contributor to national and regional security, and as a core element of the European social model, in each case supported by appropriate policies.
- 2) The existing model of public procurement should be revisited to assess the extent to which it supports or undermines emergency preparedness. Dimensions such as ability to respond quickly and transparency against corruption should be considered.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/expert_panel/docs/026_health_socialcare_covid19_en.pdf

² <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/10/industrial-policy-saved-europes-vaccine-drive/>

3) The European Commission, working with Member States and regions, should develop a Foresight function to anticipate and prepare for major threats to health, linked to financial mechanisms to release funds when needed.

4) Emergency preparedness should be assessed formally within the European semester processes and linked to regional and structural funding allocations.

More broadly, more health competencies at the EU-level are needed in order to adequately address serious cross-border threats to health and increase the resilience of Member States' health and social systems. Safety and equity must be ensured. HERA, as currently proposed, has the potential to offer additional value added, provided its work is complementary to that of existing agencies (ECDC, EMA) and carried out via close coordination with existing agencies/groups undertaking similar activities. Transparency and participation of key stakeholders are important principles to incorporate in the further development of HERA and its role. Aspects of governance, and specifically which powers would be retained by the Member States, require additional clarification in future iterations of the proposal.

In conclusion, Member States need support in order to strengthen the resilience of their health and social care systems and strategic preparedness for new challenges, such as the next pandemic. As stated in its Resilient Health and Social Care opinion, the Panel welcomes the strategy "A European Health Union"³ tackling health crises together. HERA, as currently proposed, may be a potential part of the solution leading to the creation of robust structures that support greater preparedness and increased resilience of health systems, within current diversity, in Member States and regions.

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³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union_en