

## Flash Report

### First meeting of the Public Health Expert Group (PHEG)

3 February 2023

DG SANTE hosted an online meeting chaired by the Acting Deputy Director General for Health to establish the rules of procedure and working methods of the new Public Health Expert Group (PHEG) and to set out the mandates of two new sub-groups on mental health and vaccination. The representatives of 25 Member States, as well as Norway and Iceland attended the meeting, together with Commission services and agencies<sup>1</sup>.

#### Overview of the PHEG

Established by a Decision of the Commission in December 2022, the PHEG replaces the Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases (SGPP).<sup>2</sup> The new expert group will broaden the scope of action beyond NCDs in order to more effectively target other important public health concerns such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis, vaccination and antimicrobial resistance. The PHEG will assist the Commission in the preparation of policy and legislative initiatives, establish guidelines and indicators, and exchange best practices and research results between Member States to address major public health challenges in the EU. Member States broadly welcomed the formation of the new expert group and adopted the rules of procedure and working methods of the PHEG as proposed by DG SANTE.

#### New sub-groups on mental health and vaccination

In addition to the existing sub-groups on cancer and non-communicable diseases, which would continue under the PHEG, DG SANTE presented the mandates for two new time limited sub-groups on mental health and vaccination. The new sub-groups would contribute to policy initiatives such as the new Commission initiative on mental health as well as the preparation of the Council Recommendation on vaccine preventable cancers as well as more broadly developing policies and actions to support and complement action at national and EU level. The establishment of the sub-groups was welcomed by the Member States, with an emphasis on the need to avoid duplication between the vaccination sub-group and the existing cancer sub-group as well as other bodies such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority.

#### PHEG Work Plan

Member States would be invited to co-create the rolling agenda for the PHEG's priorities via a short survey which would be circulated in March to all Member States. The responses would then be analysed and the finalised work plan presented in the autumn after further consultation with Member States.

#### Long COVID network

DG SANTE also announced the proposed formation of a new special expert network on long COVID, bringing national centres of expertise together in one group under the Health Policy Platform. After discussion, it was agreed that further details in writing on the scope and modalities of the new network would be circulated to Member States in the coming weeks to enable them to make a decision on supporting the proposal, and explaining the link between the expert network and the public health expert group.

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<sup>1</sup> Directorates-General represented included Health and Food Safety (SANTE), Research and Innovation (RTD) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) as well as representatives from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA).

<sup>2</sup> [https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/c\\_2022\\_8816\\_en.pdf](https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/c_2022_8816_en.pdf)

### Conclusion and next steps

The Chair thanked all participants for their valuable input and said it provided a good basis for future meetings of the new expert group. The first meeting of the sub-group on mental health would take place on 14 February 2023.