



Evaluation study of the work of the Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health (EXPH) Executive Summary – English

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Abstract

This report evaluates the work of the Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health (EXPH). The study evaluated the effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence of the EXPH and aimed to assess the current format, the rules of procedure and the working methods of the Panel. It also evaluated the relevance of the EXPH by assessing its opinions' impacts, including how they were disseminated to stakeholders.

The study found that the EXPH's work has been largely relevant to the EU health agenda and priorities, and coherent with the work of other EU bodies. However, recommendations to improve its relevance include making them more actionable, shorter, and timelier. Similarly, the study found that the EXPH has met its objectives and increased interest and knowledge across areas. It is also considered as independent and trustworthy, and, albeit less so, as a multisectoral source of information. Moreover, the latter is an area where further improvement is recommended. Results show that views differed on the perception of the lasting impact of the work of the EXPH.

Working methods and rules of procedure were considered adequate. The format, content of opinions, mandates, roles and ways of working of the secretariat were considered the most efficient, voting rules and accelerated procedures least efficient. Recommended improvements relate to the collaboration aspects of the Panel and how targeted audiences are reached.

The study analysed the challenges that were identified and indicated which ones could bring about improvements where needed. Specific themes regarding changes include better interaction with stakeholders, increased Panel diversity, timelier delivery of opinions, and more clarity, actionability and innovativeness of the work of the Panel.

Executive Summary

Introduction and study purpose

This study was commissioned to ICF by the European Commission with the purpose of assessing the work of the Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health (EXPH). The study evaluated the effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence of the EXPH by assessing the current format, the rules of procedure and working methods of the Panel. It also evaluated the relevance of the EXPH by assessing the impact of its opinions, including the way opinions are disseminated to stakeholders. The period covered is the implementation of the EXPH between 2013 and 2022 and encompasses 24 opinions.

The Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health (EXPH) is an interdisciplinary and independent group established by the European Commission, which is aimed at providing advice on effective ways of investing in health. It was created in 2012 and came into force in 2013. The Decision was originally intended to apply until 1 October 2015, however, it was extended twice, first by Commission Decision 2015/6719/EC and, subsequently, by Commission Decision 2019/C 174/04 . This is because, the Commission deemed both in 2015 and 2019 that the Panel was "best placed" to serve as a mechanism for pooling expertise at EU level and for providing relevant advice contributing to accessible, effective and sustainable health systems, and considered it "essential" that the EXPH be able to carry out these functions. The EXPH will continue to operate until 31 December 2022.

The EXPH aimed to provide independent advice on how to improve health systems, in particular on their accessibility, resilience, effectiveness and investment in health.

- Accessibility: the EXPH seeks to provide evidence-based information to improve the access to appropriate and timely health care;

- Resilience: the EXPH aims to identify the methods and tools that will allow health systems to adapt and be more responsive and resilient across time and towards new and emerging health threats; and
- Effectiveness: the EXPH focuses on how to improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of health systems to provide better care to the European population.

Methodology

The study, which was aligned to the Better Regulation Guidelines, used the following methodology:

- Five exploratory interviews with EXPH Members, DG SANTE, researchers and NGOs, were carried out to collect stakeholder's perceptions on the approach and objectives of the study.
- An in-depth preliminary document review: an in-depth preliminary document review to identify documents for the desk review. 528 documents, including EXPH outputs, academic literature, published reports, and webpages, were rigorously reviewed and mapped against the assessment criteria.
- A document and literature review was carried out covering 234 documents, such as academic papers, reports, and position papers, and strategic documents which illustrating evolving needs and priorities of Member States in relation to pertinent health topics covered by the Panel.
- A mapping of EXPH's outputs was conducted to analyse qualitative elements of EXPH work (Mandates, opinions, meetings/events/hearings), which included scraping the European Commission's website for publications.
- A thematic analysis: carried out to analyse the uptake of the 24 opinions against European Commission priorities in health.
- A citation analysis: carried out to analyse the uptake of EXPH opinions in publications by reviewing a number of citations.
- A targeted survey: conducted to collect the views of key stakeholders. These were individuals and organisations directly involved in the work of the EXPH, benefitting from the work of the EXPH, or having an interest in the Panel. 73 responses were received across all stakeholder groups.
- Targeted interviews: 22 interviews were carried out to collect insights from the different stakeholder groups and to cross-check findings from other data collected and fill-in evidence gaps.
- Focus groups: two focus groups were conducted to validate the findings of the study and the results from other consultation activities. One Focus Group was organised with EXPH members (former and current) and another one with DG SANTE and a mix of stakeholders.

The outputs of the various research tasks were brought together in the synthesis phase, which consisted in producing a final report through the triangulation of collected evidence, and comprehensively answering the study questions.

Key findings

Relevance

This study shows that the EXPH's work (Mandates, opinions, and recommendations) has been largely relevant to the EU health agenda and priorities, as well as to the needs of the stakeholders consulted. It has focused on key policy topics; it has been evidence-based, comprehensive, transparent, and clear; and it has contained valuable information, including good practices. Such relevance applies to its work over time – that is, from its start through to the present day – and in light of the challenges faced by the public health sector, notably with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging cross-border health

threats. Relevance was found to have improved over time, due to increased collaboration within the Panel and between the Panel and DG SANTE. However, opinions could be shorter, timelier, and more actionable. Focusing on how rather than what to do was suggested as an adequate approach. Similarly, the opinion's recommendations were considered 'relevant' and 'specific', agreement was lower as for how 'measurable' and 'achievable' they were – thus, suggesting again that a more practical approach could better match stakeholders' needs.

Effectiveness

Findings show that the EXPH has met its objectives, despite some potential scope for further improvement. The EXPH is considered an independent, trustworthy, and – albeit less so – a multisectoral source of information and advice, thanks to well-defined processes and strong members' expertise. However, the multi-sectoral approach and members' multi-disciplinarity and geographical balance could be further improved. Gender imbalance has decreased over time. Overall, the EXPH opinions were found to have increased interest, knowledge and / or expertise across areas, and to have facilitated and promoted evidence exchange and discussion. However, the impact on policy implementation at EU level and particularly at national level were less clear.

The perception of the relevance and (lasting) impact of given Mandates, opinions, and recommendations vary across different stakeholders, largely based on their involvement with the EXPH, as well as their needs and interests. Similarly, views generally differ as to which Mandates and opinions were most or least relevant and addressed by the Panel, on one hand; and most relevant but not addressed by the Panel, on the other hand. Similarly, in terms of effectiveness, stakeholders referred back to a range of opinions and recommendations.

Efficiency

The current working methods and rules of procedure are considered to largely provide the right framework for efficient ways of working. Format and content of opinions, Mandates, roles and ways of working of the Secretariat were considered most efficient; while minority opinions, and accelerated procedures, as well as voting rules, were perceived as least efficient. However, some opinions were published with severe delays. Overall, members were satisfied with the value found in being part of the Panel and with their own role and their fellow members. Yet, members' expertise, their division of work, and the collaboration between newcomers and longstanding members were mentioned among the areas that could be improved. Further, the principles for the operation of the Panel - excellence, independence, transparency, confidentiality, and multi-sectoral approach -were viewed as largely appropriate, and new principles were also suggested. Some dissemination activities were carried out, however, improvements were strongly suggested by a variety of stakeholders in this area, to reach the right target audiences and in turn increase the impact of the Panel.

Coherence

The study found that the work of the EXPH supported DG SANTE priorities over time, although it was felt that it contributed less to the DG SANTE 2019-2024 priority 'diminishing the impact of cancer in Europe'. The Panel has been to a large extent aligned with the work of other EU bodies, but not as much with the work of international organisations. Even less alignment was found with the work of national organisations.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study analysed what challenges were identified and referred particularly to what changes could bring about improvement where needed. Certain themes regarding changes are rather cross-cutting across evaluation criteria:

- More clarity, actionability, and innovativeness - stakeholders lamented a lack of clarity and/or transparency on how Mandates are formulated and for what policy goals. Mandates were also perceived to be too broad or vague, which would affect the actionability of opinions. This theme largely applies to the relevance of the EXPH, with some mismatch between needs and output. In turn, it also hindered its effectiveness, use, and (lasting) impact of the opinions and their recommendations. It also impacted the efficiency of the Panel's work and its coherence, in terms of potential duplication of efforts and challenges in producing new insights.
- Better interaction with stakeholders – was considered a key theme across evaluation criteria. Improved collaboration with stakeholders at EU and, particularly, at national level would further support relevance – both in terms of current needs and a more forward-looking and strategic approach to public health needs. Key hindrances to the achievement of the EXPH's objective were perceived to be the low level of interaction with stakeholders, particularly but not limited to national ones, and awareness of stakeholders of its work, including visibility and dissemination of the opinions. These findings point to the notion that opinions are less used to contribute to national policy development. The EXPH could differentiate its approach to targeted groups. It could also have a stronger bottom-up and dialogical approach that better involves local and national stakeholders, for instance, defining Mandates and including feedback from public hearings. Dissemination efforts were considered to have substantial scope for improvement, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, given the challenges related to dissemination processes and resources (e.g., low time and lack of budget to devote to it). Regarding efficiency, some EXPH (present and past) members also mentioned that meeting in different cities would increase contact with national stakeholders from different countries. Finally, in terms of coherence, low interaction with stakeholders also generated less alignment with the work of national bodies.
- Time pressure, timeliness, and prioritisation – A timelier delivery of opinions would mitigate the risk of any mismatch between needs and output: shorter outputs could be useful to lighten members' workload and time pressure, as well as better meet stakeholder needs. Despite the group functioning well, research assistance and stronger Secretarial support (from DG SANTE) were considered efficient changes that could relieve pressure, and so would the adoption of an efficient approach informed by project management in how opinions are drafted. More structurally, to promptly address needs, stakeholders considered prioritisation and the opportunity to have a more 'proactive' approach rather than a 'reactive' one. Such a predictive and future-oriented approach could prevent future issues from turning into fully-fledged crises; besides, starting work early on them would allow for producing timely advice with less time pressure. Finally, time pressure was considered to hinder interaction with stakeholders and dissemination efforts.
- Increased Panel's diversity – EXPH opinions were seen as not always relevant, with suggestions to increase the representation of multi-disciplinary expertise on the Panel. What is more, this could also increase the efficiency of the principle for the operation of the Panel in terms of a multi-sectoral approach, including, for instance, a 'health in all policy approach.' Increased diversity in terms of professional background could also favour more practical and actionable outputs. This is because sometimes opinions do not tackle in-depth how to bring about change – which is considered to be in no small part due to a lack of direct experience from Panel members of everyday health and healthcare work activities, while they possess excellent scientific knowledge. What is more, the better geographical coverage of countries would support members leveraging more in their national and local context, in terms of interaction and dialogue with stakeholders and dissemination efforts.

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