

## EXPERT PANEL ON EFFECTIVE WAYS OF INVESTING IN HEALTH

### Request for an opinion: Facing the Impact of Post-COVID-19 condition on Health Systems

#### Background - Rationale

Preliminary estimates indicate that about 10% of those infected with COVID-19 will experience debilitating symptoms lasting much longer than expected and lead to impaired quality of life<sup>1</sup>. The term used by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is *post-COVID-19 condition* (also referred to as ‘Long COVID’).

The high prevalence of COVID-19 in Europe foreshadows a potential significant burden on national health systems linked to addressing post-COVID-19 condition in the future.

As the disease burden caused by post-COVID-19 condition on health systems increases, countries are striving to define appropriate clinical pathways (diagnosis, symptom management) while waiting for biomedical research to discover potential therapeutic approaches.

The EU strategy on COVID-19 therapeutics specifically mentions post-COVID-19 condition in the framework of research, development and innovation actions, as it requires a different therapeutic approach to COVID-19. Such therapeutics are distinct from specific COVID-19 therapeutics since they will not target the viral infection, but the wide range of negative health effects that persist long after the infection has been resolved.

One major limitation to defining appropriate clinical pathways is the current uncertainty on the spectrum of presentation, pathophysiology, symptom makeup and expected clinical course of post-COVID-19 condition. While post COVID-19 condition is still being studied, it is clear that the condition can affect both patients who had severe symptoms requiring hospitalisation and developed post-COVID-19 condition following discharge and recovery from acute disease, as well as individuals who seemingly had mild to no symptoms during their initial infection but developed post-COVID condition thereafter.

At the same time, there is an urgent need to understand the resource and organizational implications of post-COVID-19 condition for health systems in the medium to long term, including an assessment of whether current payment systems are fit for purpose to meet the care needs of this novel class of patients. Lastly, there is a need to better understand the health, social and economic impact of post-COVID-19 condition on patients and their carers.

This Opinion from the Expert Panel should be based on a review of the latest available evidence (including ongoing work from the ECDC and EMA) and any other relevant ongoing research activities. This includes relevant projects funded by the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Framework programmes, such as those on COVID-19 cohort studies and therapeutics, as well as the upcoming European Partnership on Transforming Health and Care Systems. The

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<sup>1</sup> [WHO/Europe | Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak - In the wake of the pandemic: preparing for Long COVID \(2021\)](#)

recommendations should be operational, and provide a solid basis for the development of support actions to improve the quality and accessibility of care services for post-COVID-19 condition patients.

The **target audience** of this opinion are policymakers, health service purchasers and managers including those working within health, social and welfare systems and responsible for the planning, organisation, financing and delivery of care and support services at national, regional or local level.

### **Questions for the Expert Panel**

The Expert Panel is requested to provide a concise document with analysis and recommendations on the following points:

1. Make an overview of current state-of-the art on what post-COVID-19 condition is, its probable causes and symptoms, using the available literature to date, including the work carried out by the ECDC in this area.
2. Provide an analysis of the main knowledge, organisational and resource requirements for healthcare systems to design and develop appropriate health services for post COVID-19 condition.
3. Provide guidance on how public health surveillance should be adapted to measure the impact of post-COVID-19 condition on the population.

### **Timing:**

- Start of the work: February 2022
- Finalisation in October 2022