

# Note of the Meeting

## Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases

18 June 2021

On 18 June 2021, the Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases held a virtual meeting, chaired by DG SANTE. The representatives of 22 Member States, plus Norway, attended the meeting together with a number of Commission services and agencies<sup>1</sup> and the European Investment Bank.

### **Welcome and introduction**

The Chair welcomed the participants and informed the SGPP on the latest developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular the EU response, including the roll out of the COVID-19 Digital Certificate, the launch of the EU Strategy on COVID-19 therapeutics<sup>2</sup> and the Commission Communication on lessons learnt<sup>3</sup> which was adopted on 15 June. He stressed the importance of preparing the actions under the EU4Health annual work programme for 2021<sup>4</sup>.

The Chair gave also an update on the high-level conference on Mental Health and the Pandemic<sup>5</sup> organised by DG SANTE on 10 May and hosted by Commissioner Kyriakides. The event kicked off 2021 European Mental Health Week and attracted the interest of more than 1800 participants.

### **Update on best practices, technical support of DG REFORM, and implementable research results**

In November 2020, Member States were invited to identify **practices in primary care**. 50 candidate practices were submitted, among which 11 practices met the criteria for the submission and were showcased through an online marketplace in June 2021. In a survey after the Marketplace, the Member States indicated which practices they want to pursue further for potential transfer and pilot implementation with support from EU programmes. DG SANTE presented the ranking of practices according to the choices of nine Member States that responded by the date of the meeting. Five best practices had scored higher than the rest at that moment.

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<sup>1</sup> Directorates-General represented included Energy (ENER), Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL), Environment (ENV), Research and Innovation (RTD), Reform (REFORM), as well as the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and representatives from a number of EU decentralised and executive agencies such as European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and Consumer, Health and Food Executive Agency.

<sup>2</sup> [Communication: EU Strategy on COVID-19 therapeutics | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Communication on the early lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [WP 2021 annex comments LS \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/non\\_communicable\\_diseases/events/ev\\_20210510\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/non_communicable_diseases/events/ev_20210510_en)

## DISCUSSION

**France, Croatia and Malta** will send in their suggestions after the meeting. **Italy** noted that the Joint Action is a rare opportunity to get Member States working together. Italy also mentioned the need to be flexible in order to encourage broad participation.

**Czechia** explained that they selected two practices: Telea (Spain) and Integrated care for complex chronic patients in Andalusia (Spain).

**Norway** thanked us for the comprehensive and interesting presentation and noted that the eleven best practices in primary health care all present valuable insight; they support the choice made. This was echoed by **Spain**.

The **European Investment Bank** stated their readiness to offer support as required, including at the scale-up stage.

At the request of Member States, DG SANTE extended the deadline to respond to the survey to the end of June. After this date, the final ranking of best practices will be sent by email to achieve agreement on those practices that can be transferred in the upcoming Joint Action under the EU4Health programme.

The **open call for best practices on the prevention of non-communicable diseases and related risk factors** was published at the end of 2020; 43 candidate practices were received, and after careful screening, at least 10 practices met the criteria for the submission of practices. Five practices relate to the topic of NCD risk prevention – obesity, nutrition and diabetes; three practices relate to the area of NCD risk prevention – addictions, and two practices relate to mental health.

A marketplace event will be organised on 30 June and 1 July. A survey will be launched after the marketplace, requesting SGPP members to give their opinion on which best practices they want to transfer; the deadline for expressions of interest is 9 July. The Commission will then identify the best ways to support the implementation of such practices, to be funded via the EU4Health Programme or other funding instruments.

## DISCUSSION

Both **Belgium** and **Malta** asked for an extension to the deadline in order to have more time for input at national level. DG SANTE will check with financial colleagues and revert. (the deadline was subsequently extended to 15 July).

**Italy** spoke of the Joint Actions in the 2021 Work Programme and asked if these were different from those presented. DG SANTE explained that the practices chosen by the Member States can be financed under this 2021 work programme. DG SANTE then added the need to expedite the ranking exercise in order to align the call for best practices with the timing of the annual work programme.

SGPP was then informed about the **Technical Support Instrument (TSI)**<sup>6</sup> of the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM)<sup>7</sup>, a key technical support instrument to help the EU emerge stronger and more resilient from the current crisis. Each Member State can request technical support to design and/or implement reforms identified by the European Commission; measures needed to implement EU priorities and EU law; reforms undertaken on its own initiative. Co-financing is not a requirement, and the support can cover the whole cycle of the reform projects. Requests<sup>8</sup> should be submitted by 31 October of each year, via a National Coordinating Authority; the new focus on multi-country collaboration will be useful for clusters of countries. A webinar can be organised

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<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/overview-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument-tsi\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/overview-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en)

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/structural-reform-support\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/structural-reform-support_en)

<sup>8</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/template-request-technical-support\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/template-request-technical-support_en)

for the SGPP according to their interest areas for technical support; Member States will indicate their priority areas next week.

## **DISCUSSION**

The **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction** indicated their interest in specific projects linked to drug-related problems.

**France** expressed their thanks for the instrument, which supports current issues the results of which will be used across Europe, for example, antimicrobial resistance and off-patent antibiotics.

**Belgium** asked if the selection of policy areas was via a drop-down list or free text, to which DG REFORM responded that Member States are free to select the area of greatest importance.

**Spain** commented on the timing, with flagship actions proposed in 2022, and asked for the thematic areas for 2023. DG REFORM responded that they wait to see the priorities of Member States by the end of October 2021, in order to start dialogues.

The SGPP was subsequently informed about a project aimed to **develop a methodology on implementable research results**. Its objective is to improve the implementation of research results by developing a robust identification process for research projects with a practical impact for policymakers, stakeholders and ultimately the citizens.

After a presentation on the initial mapping, the SGPP members were invited to suggest relevant projects as worth implementing. In addition, SGPP members were invited to provide recommendations on how the projects might link to national level initiatives, e.g. already having developed a similar methodology. The SGPP members were asked for their suggestions by the end of the month, via email.

## **DISCUSSION**

**Slovenia** indicated their national interest in the activity, also given its links to the upcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and in particular, a high-level conference under the Presidency, Implementing Innovative Solutions for Resilient Health Systems, scheduled for 15-16 July 2021. **Slovakia** indicated their support for the activity and stated they thought it useful.

### **Annual Work Programme for 2021 under the EU4Health Programme**

The SGPP was briefed on the EU4Health Programme, and the annual work plan for 2021, which will provide €311.68 million for actions on crisis preparedness, disease prevention, health systems and the healthcare workforce, and the digitalisation of the EU4Health Programme. It was noted that the first work programme was adopted the same day as the SGPP meeting<sup>9</sup>. It was explained that the 2021 EU4Health Work Programme supports a broad range of actions under four overarching strands and a cross-cutting focus on cancer. The 2021 Work Programme is intended as a policy implementation tool for both legislative and non-legislative initiatives, such as the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe<sup>10</sup>, EU health legislation, and the Europe's Beating Cancer Action Plan<sup>11</sup>. Finally, it was explained that the European Health and Digital Executive Agency<sup>12</sup> (HaDEA) will be responsible for the implementation of the vast majority of the EU4Health Programme budget, in coordination with the Commission.

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<sup>9</sup> Corrigendum adopted on 24 June 2021.

<sup>10</sup> [A pharmaceutical strategy for Europe | Public Health \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [2021\\_01\\_25 Communication - Europe's Beating Cancer Plan v.24 - CLEAN EVENING \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [European Health and Digital Executive Agency \(europa.eu\)](#)

## DISCUSSION

**Austria** asked about future funding options for non-governmental organisations under the EU4Health Programme. DG SANTE responded that in 2021, they can be funded under the Action Grant; Commission services met with NGOs to explain the rationale of the choice made in WP2021 and invited them to use these funding opportunities. Discussions are currently underway with both NGOs and Member States to define the financing tools in WP2022 and there is also a large increase in the budget for NGOs; this discussion will take place through the processes established by the programme regulation, the EU4Health Steering Group and Programme Committee.

**Czechia** asked which activities would be implemented directly by the Commission and not by HaDEA; SANTE explained that more information will be provided at a later stage but that actions implemented directly by the Commission will be limited to politically sensitive dossiers or procurement.

**Belgium** asked about the timing of calls; DG SANTE responded that the first calls would open soon and closing on 15 September, and that in autumn the remaining calls would be launched, with a closing date early in the new year. Regarding Joint Actions, more information will be provided, but a first and second wave are foreseen with procurement taking place in parallel.

### **Mission on Cancer**

DG RTD updated the participants on the Mission on Cancer. The implementation plan was submitted for political validation in June. A decision on the full implementation of Missions will be taken by the end of the month, with a Commission Communication on Missions foreseen for the autumn. The Horizon Europe Mission Work Programme has just been adopted, resulting in the opening of calls for 2021; an update of the Work Programme will be prepared during the third quarter of 2021. A session on Missions will be held within the European Research and Innovation Days<sup>13</sup> on 23-24 June.

### **SGPP Sub-group on Cancer**

DG SANTE informed that the Sub-group on Cancer under the Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases has already held two virtual meetings, on 03.05.2021 and 04.06.2021, jointly chaired by DG RTD and DG SANTE. During the first meeting the rules of procedure and working methods were agreed, and a new "Commission and Member State-led" network was formed at the Health Policy Platform<sup>14</sup> as an effective information flow triangle between the sub-group, the SGPP, and the Horizon Europe Programme Committee. During the second meeting, members were informed by DG RTD and DG SANTE about the first thematic topics, being the **SAMIRA Action Plan**<sup>15</sup>, **Comprehensive Cancer Infrastructures**, to be established in each Member State and to their networking at EU level; the **Cancer Inequalities Register** which aims to identify trends, disparities and inequalities between Member States and regions and for which it was agreed to create an ad-hoc technical group to take it further; and the **EC Knowledge Centre on Cancer**<sup>16</sup>. Finally, meetings have been scheduled until the end of the year.

### **Scientific Committees' opinions**

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<sup>13</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/events/upcoming-events/research-innovation-days>

<sup>14</sup> <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/hpf/>

<sup>15</sup> [SAMIRA: Strategic Agenda for Medical Ionising Radiation Applications \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/samira/)

<sup>16</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/event/conference/launch-ec-knowledge-centre-cancer>

DG SANTE informed the SGPP about the Commission's Scientific Committees, who provide scientific advice based on the best available scientific knowledge as a basis of policy making for EU policy on public health, consumer safety and the environment.

#### AOB

**Slovenia** informed members of their high-level conference under the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Implementing Innovative Solutions for Resilient Health Systems, scheduled for 15-16 July 2021.

**Austria** asked if there were plans for a future meeting of the high-level group on nutrition and physical activity. **Belgium** asked specifically about the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action. DG SANTE explained the background for the SGPP; all disease or issue specific expert groups were discontinued as a holistic approach via the SGPP had been chosen, with Member States choosing the topics to address. It was noted that new topics can be chosen from 2022. **Austria** then commented on the sheer number of topics to be covered by one committee, and the need for political topics to be considered as well. DG SANTE responded that formerly, there were over ten groups on different topics, each meeting 3-4 times per year, which became unmanageable. At the political level, also the Member States criticised the number of meetings on public health. In order to support the Member States in reaching the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and WHO's targets on non-communicable diseases, the Member States indicate annually where their priorities lie. The palette of best practices is offered to Member States via a marketplace, then the Commission finances the chosen practices. This does not, however, stop the activities which continue in the background, for example, the From Farm to Fork Strategy.

**Slovenia** asked if additional sub-groups of the SGPP can be established; sub-groups are established when something specific is needed, for example, as was the case for proton therapy centres and the current sub-group on cancer.

The meeting was concluded by identifying the date of the next meeting as 18 October and thanking participants for their valuable and enriching input.