

## Overcoming Europe's health challenges requires bold political choices

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Opinion

The upcoming European Health Forum Gastein will be an opportunity to tackle Europe's health challenges head on, writes Karin Kadenbach.



**Karin Kadenbach** | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

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The current challenges facing European health systems are unparalleled. As the political climate in many EU member states is shifting, concerns over the sustainability of health systems persist.

The issue of high prices of innovative therapies and access to medicines, cross-border threats such as antimicrobial resistance, and the e-effects of Europe's ageing societies are here to stay.

The need for transformation is unequivocal. Now is the time to make sure that Europe's challenges

remain firmly rooted on political agendas at all levels and to meet these challenges with bold choices.

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One year before the European institutional changeover and with the deadline of 2030 to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) rapidly approaching, we have an opportunity to set the right priorities and take decisive action. This call for bold political choices lies at the heart of this year's European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG).

Indeed, we need to be daring if we want health to be a priority on the European agenda after the elections of 2019 and if we are serious about meeting the health targets of the SDGs by 2030.

This is why I am pleased to host an EHFG event in the European Parliament on 25 June, to get the ball rolling.

One thing we can all agree on is that healthy European citizens are the foundation of socially and economically prospering societies. Goal three of Agenda 2030 for the SDGs recognises exactly this: "Ensuring healthy lives and promoting the wellbeing for all at all ages is essential to sustainable development".

This third goal is accompanied by an ambitious set of targets, implying how public health policies should match broader policy agendas and calling for significant investments as well as audacious action plans. If anything, the SDGs reveal that there is a strong vision for progress, both in Europe and beyond. Yet how can we make sure that Agenda 2030 translates into more than simply a bucket list?

Pursuing bold political choices actually implies being pragmatic and implementing practical solutions. This is particularly urgent for threats like antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which, according to the European Commission, leads to around 25,000 premature deaths in Europe per year.

The motion for a European Parliament resolution on a European One Health action plan against AMR, for which I am the rapporteur in the environment, public health and food safety committee, therefore reflects the much-needed pragmatic mindset.

One of the practical solutions put forward by Parliament is to develop public health messages. This is an important part of the solution, because citizens in Europe are insufficiently aware of the threat posed by AMR.

Additionally, the report proposes the developing rapid diagnostic tests for health professionals, who are often confronted with the challenge of having to make rapid decisions on a therapeutic indication for antibiotic treatment. Developing training facilities for medical professionals that focus on the careful use of antibiotics is another of the practical solutions outlined in the report.

This emphasis on health professionals feeds into one of our greatest challenges when it comes to the sustainability of health systems: protecting the critical human resources upon which entire health

systems are built.

Trained nurses, medical professionals and even caregivers are at the heart of well-functioning health systems. Consequently, tackling existing human resource gaps and problems, which are multi-faceted in a continent as diverse as Europe, is a key priority on the path towards meeting the Agenda 2030 goals.

Human resources also lie at the very heart of the big political promises to strengthen health systems, such as the Tallinn Charter. The Charter, launched by the European Members of the World Health Organisation in 2008, 10 years ago this year, outlines promising commitments to act. Even although there has been a great deal of progress on these commitments over the past decade, there remains plenty of work to be done.

2018 is the time to give Europe's health challenges a taste of their own medicine. Gathering over 500 European health policy experts from the realms of policymaking, research, civil society and business, the EHFG (3-5 October 2018 - Bad Hofgastein, Austria) is the right place to start.

## About the author

Karin Kadenbach (S&D, AT) is a Vice-President of European Health Forum Gastein

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