

Commission diagnoses the state of health in the EU

Only by rethinking our health systems can we ensure that they remain fit-for-purpose and provide patient-centred care. This is what the 28 Country Health Profiles published today by the Commission, along with the Companion Report suggest. The reports provide an in-depth analysis of EU Member States' health systems. They look at the health of the population and important risk factors, as well as at the effectiveness, accessibility and resilience of health systems in each EU member state. The reports clearly reflect shared objectives across the member states, and reveal potential areas where the Commission can encourage mutual learning and exchange of good practices.

Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said: *"Spending only 3% of our health budgets on prevention, compared with 80% on the treatment of diseases, is simply not enough. We need better access to primary care so that the emergency room isn't people's first port of call. And we need to enshrine health promotion and disease prevention into all policy sectors to improve people's health and reduce pressure on health systems. These are just a few of the diagnoses coming out from our 2017 State of Health in the EU report. By offering comprehensive data and insights, we aim to support national health authorities in tackling the challenges and in making the right policy and investment choices. I hope they will make good use of it."*

A lack of context-sensitive, comprehensive analysis has long been identified as a major obstacle for health policy makers. To fill this knowledge gap, this month the Commission completed the first [two-year cycle of the State of Health](#) in the EU.

Key findings

The Country Health Profiles were prepared in cooperation with the [OECD](#) and the [European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies](#). Five cross-cutting conclusions come forward in the Companion Report:

- Health promotion and disease prevention pave the way for a more effective and efficient health system. Aside from the unbalanced investments in prevention, social inequalities need to be tackled, as illustrated by the differences in cancer screening or physical activity between people with higher and lower income and education.
- Strong primary care efficiently guides patients through the health system and helps avoid wasteful spending. 27% visit an emergency department because of inadequate primary care. Only 14 EU countries require primary care referral for consulting a specialist; 9 other countries have financial incentives for referrals.
- Integrated care ensures that a patient receives joined-up care. It avoids the situation we currently see in nearly all EU countries, where care is fragmented and patients have to search their way through a maze

of care facilities.

- Proactive health workforce planning and forecasting make health systems resilient to future evolutions. The EU has 18 million healthcare professionals, and another 1.8 million jobs will be created by 2025. Health authorities need to prepare their workforce for upcoming changes: an ageing population and multimorbidity, the need for sound recruitment policies, new skills, and technical innovation.
- Patients should be at the centre of the next generation of better health data for policy and practice. The digital transformation of health and care helps capture real-world outcomes and experiences that matter to patients, with great potential for strengthening the effectiveness of health systems.

Next steps

Following the presentation to Health Ministries of all EU countries, national authorities can further discuss these reports with the experts of the OECD and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. The voluntary exchanges will be able to take place from the beginning of 2018 and help Ministries to better understand the main challenges and develop the appropriate policy responses.

More information:

- The 28 Country Health Profiles, the Companion Report and more background information can be found [here](#).
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