



All Policies for a Healthy Europe

Improving citizens' well-being

www.healthyeurope.eu

secretariat@ap4he.eu

[@wellbeingEU](https://twitter.com/wellbeingEU)

#Wellbeing4All #HealthyEurope

**Strengthening the link between well-being and
the economy: the key to a successful and sustainable
European Care Strategy**

Introduction

Funding for prevention, care systems, innovation and care workers is beneficial for the economy.¹

Care², in all its forms, is a vital part of citizens' lives and a country's economy, despite difficulties to measure its economic impact³. In the long term, a lack of care infrastructures or dysfunctional care systems could seriously hamper the European economic recovery. Prevention, addressing unmet needs and bringing care closer to communities will be an essential part of the economy in an ageing continent, where Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and physical inactivity are developing at a rapid pace⁴.



Improving care for society as a whole requires a 'Culture of Care': inclusive and holistic health & care systems with a life-cycle approach to care. To respond to the future challenges of healthy ageing, physical inactivity and NCDs like cancer, these next generation health & care systems will need to overcome short-term cost containments and focus instead on patient- and prevention-centric health & care capable of absorbing rising labour demands.

However, care, prevention and health innovation are chronically and systematically under-funded and European governments have not been able to provide sustainable financing of care systems and prevention⁵. This has a demonstrated impact on the European economy. For example, The OECD has highlighted the adverse effects on the economy of widespread obesity⁶ or of poor mental health⁷. In France, the Ministry of the Environment has demonstrated that physical inactivity is responsible for €140 billion every year on healthcare spending and 'social costs' of limited productivity, well-being, etc⁸. Data on the adverse economic impact of the lack of prevention at EU level is unfortunately lacking.

Additionally, the lack of sustained investment in prevention, care, innovation and public health by authorities is topped by increased labour shortages in the health & care sector, despite rising needs. In 2022, it is estimated that two million workers are missing in the healthcare sector⁹.

[All Policies for a Healthy Europe](#), a cross-sectoral initiative geared towards putting people's well-being at the centre of all areas of EU policy-making, welcomes the European Commission's European Care Strategy. This strategy is focusing on sustainable long-term care, early-childhood care and education through a life-cycle approach to care, taking into consideration care givers as well as care receivers.

To ensure the success of this Strategy, the European Commission and Member States first need to create the conditions for sustainable, robust and systematic investment in care, prevention, health innovation, sport & physical activity, to foster a virtuous circle in which citizens' well-being drives economic prosperity, stability and resilience¹⁰.



Our recommendations:

Healthy Europe is keen to support the European Commission in its actions towards sustainable long-term care. To that end, the Coalition has developed the following recommendations building on the expertise of its cross-sectoral and transversal membership and concrete case studies:

Recommendation 1 – Create distinct “EU4Care” missions for prevention, long-term care and healthy ageing under existing funding instruments

The Commission needs to clearly single out care as a priority in existing funding instruments. A specific ‘EU4Care’ Mission should be open in the Horizon Europe programme, the EU4Health programme, European Social Fund, Erasmus+ as well as structural and investment funds. These missions should be coordinated transversally by the Commission through a monitoring group that regularly consults stakeholders and ensure they fund projects in favour of prevention, long-term care and healthy ageing.

Recommendation 2 – Invest in prevention and early diagnosis

Better care systems mean addressing health issues at their core, through the horizontal integration of prevention in all policies. Prevention (notably against NCDs and physical inactivity) and early diagnosis crucially needs sustained and systematic investment by public authorities. This includes for example investment in sport infrastructures and sport NGOs, but also Europe-wide investment in cancer screening. In the EU4Health programme, the Commission can better support and financially contribute to more sustainable investment in prevention, with an “EU4Care” mission on prevention.



CASE STUDY:

City and community planning to prevent physical inactivity

In 2016, the International Physical Activity and Environment Network (IPEN) published a study¹¹ on the relation between physical activity and the environment. The study establishes that adults living in activity-friendly neighborhoods, with infrastructures and outdoor spaces, did 68-89 minutes more of physical activity than adults living in less activity-friendly neighborhoods.

Being active has a huge public health impact and is one the most cost-efficient prevention policy. It is estimated that physical inactivity is responsible for the deaths of 8 million people worldwide and is an increased risk factor for many non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and several types of cancer.

Proper urban planning facilitating physical activity, either with proper funding and infrastructure for cycling and walking or fitness trails, would have a crucial positive impact on activity levels, encouraging active mobility and regular exercise.



Recommendation 3 – Open a structured dialogue for a holistic & life-cycle approach to care

Sustainable financial mechanisms need long-term cooperation and coordination between all stakeholders, by sharing best practices and regularly assessing the funding of care and pre-care systems of Member States. Under the European Care Strategy, the European Commission should initiate a structured dialogue to help create the conditions for the adoption of a broader approach to care throughout Europe.

Recommendation 4 – Promote holistic and intersectoral health & care funding structures

Funding systems, such as public-private fundings, that embrace a holistic approach to the patient pathway and incorporate quality metrics can overcome short-term cost containments and focus instead on patient-centric, sustainable health & care. Getting rid of a siloed approach in health & care financing is essential to make a direct relation between where costs appear and benefits are realised. The Commission should promote this approach when evaluating the fiscal and financial stability of Member States under the European Semester process.

CASE STUDY: COVID-19: Short-term shortages in healthcare delivery can have a significant long-term socio-economic impact

According to a May 2022 OECD paper¹², the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted primary and secondary prevention efforts as well as routine care related to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The number of cancer-related procedures declined across countries, as much as 40% in some of the reporting countries. Disruptions in cancer screening in particular cause backlogs in health & care systems as well as lack of diagnosis of new patients. In Ireland, a national helpline and psychological service started for cancer patients in April 2020. A communications campaign was launched to encourage people to contact their general

practitioner if signs or symptoms of possible cancer exist and to reassure cancer patients to seek treatment, and an information leaflet was produced to announce the resumption of cancer services in May 2020. Ireland also issued a guidance document and webinar on phased reopening for community cancer support centres in June 2020. Following these efforts, by end-August the number of patients with breast and lung cancers diagnosed reached 98% and 95% of 2019 levels respectively in the country, although the number of prostate cancers diagnosed in 2020 was just 66% of last year's levels.

Recommendation 5 – Invest in improving the skill mix of health & care workers

The care sector is in demand of increasing amounts of workers. To improve job attractiveness and retention, authorities need to value health & care workers by investing in their skill mix, notably towards greater digitalisation of the patient pathway but also in favour of a shift in skills from acute hospital care to community care. Under the European Skills Agenda, the European Commission can help ensure this essential shift, notably through dedicated funding in the European Social Fund (ESF+).



References

1 [Economic Value as a guide to invest in Health and Care](#), MedTech Europe, 2016

2 Defined as: "The act or process of looking after people by undertaking tasks that they are unable to do for themselves", A [Dictionary of Social Work and Social Care](#), John Harris, Vicky White, OUP Oxford, 2013

3 [What is the evidence on the economic impacts of integrated care?](#) Ellen Nolte, Emma Pitchforth, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2014

4 [Special Eurobarometer 472 on sport and physical activity](#), 2018

5 [What if care work were recognised as a driver of sustainable growth?](#), Briefing, European Parliament Research Service, June 2022

6 [The Heavy Burden of Obesity. The Economics of Prevention](#), OECD, 2019

7 [Making Mental Health Count. The Social and Economic Costs of Neglecting Mental Health Care](#), OECD, 2014

8 [L'évaluation socioéconomique des effets de santé des projets d'investissement public](#), Benoît Dervaux et Lise Rochaix, Ministère de la Transition Ecologique, 2022

9 [Staff shortages in health increase across Europe](#), European Public Service Union, 25 January 2022

10 [Achieving an Economy of Well-being in Europe - Going Beyond GDP in the post-COVID era](#), All Policies for a Healthy Europe, 2021

11 [Urban environments in 14 cities worldwide are related to physical activity: a cross-sectional study](#), James Sallis and others, The Lancet, 2016

12 [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer care in OECD countries](#), Rie Fujisawa, OECD, May 2022

