

Tonio Borg

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health

**Commissioner Borg delivers speech on
"Efficient and Sustainable Healthcare
Systems in Europe 2020"**

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health, attends the Plenary Session of the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU

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SPEECH

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here today to share with you my vision for “Efficient and Sustainable Healthcare Systems in Europe in 2020”.

But before we look to the future, let me first take a small step back to help put matters into perspective.

On my appointment to the European Commission, just over one year ago, I made three key commitments.

My first commitment was to make a proposal – on tobacco products in time for this to be adopted within the current mandate of the European Parliament, as well as to ensure that the proposals on clinical trials and medical devices would be adopted by the co-legislator within the same timeframe.

I believe that we remain on track to achieve this result on all proposals

I would also mention an important recent achievement – the new Decision on serious cross-border threats to health which helps Member States prepare for possible future pandemics, and to protect citizens against such events.

These are part of my broad commitment to put health high on the EU Agenda.

My **second commitment** was to shift the (still) widely-held perception of health expenditure as primarily a "cost" rather than an investment, and to pass across the message that health contributes to inclusive economic growth.

This ambition underpins the Commission's policy on 'Investing in Health', which establishes health in EU's 2020 Strategy for growth and employment. Our starting point is that health is a value in itself and is also a pre-condition for economic growth and social cohesion.

My **third commitment** was to fight discrimination in health in all its forms.

Everybody should have access to good quality healthcare regardless of their gender, age, race, sexual orientation, social status, education or location.

One of my key concerns is the need to overcome stigma and discrimination in healthcare amongst vulnerable groups.

To eliminate discrimination and bridge inequalities in health, and to provide high quality healthcare for all citizens – now and for generations to come – we need high-performing, efficient, sustainable health systems.

This leads me to the central question on which you have asked me to focus.

As President Barroso said at the World Health Summit in Berlin in October, "*Health systems are the cornerstones of Europe's welfare. We must cherish their success and guarantee their future*".

It is clear that the time has come for structural reforms in Europe's health systems if we are to continue providing quality care to all citizens now and in the future.

Of course, there is no "one size fits all" solution. Each Member State must develop its own set of in-depth reforms adapted to its national particularities.

There are however, common threads. All health systems can benefit from an effectiveness and efficiency check; from greater use of modern health technology and from a greater focus on SMART investments.

I noticed that the results of your Healthcare Consumer survey show that Europeans expect their health systems to provide free and accessible services. They call on public authorities to give a higher priority and stronger resources to health.

These findings are not surprising. Let me give you a few examples of EU-level action to support the reform of EU health systems.

Through the European Union yearly cycle of economic policy coordination – the European Semester process – the Council adopted in 2013 country-specific recommendations on health for 11 EU Member States.

These recommendations encourage a more cost-effective use of public resources and also aim to make health systems more focused on improving people's access to healthcare; more focused on community care close to where people live; and less centred on hospitals.

In addition, last week Health Ministers here in Brussels adopted Council Conclusions that pave the way for more concrete co-operation among Member States on health systems sustainability; for example, on health system performance assessment; use of the EU structural funds for health investments; and integration of care.

When speaking of health systems one important milestone is the Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross-border Healthcare, which entered into force in October. This enshrines the right of citizens to receive treatment in another EU Member State and to obtain reimbursement.

The Directive also improves co-operation between Member States, for example on interoperable eHealth tools and the use of Health Technology Assessment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All of the initiatives and tools I have mentioned encourage knowledge building and greater co-operation between EU Member States.

But what have we learned as regards what makes health systems sustainable?

First – health system funding should be as stable as possible. Public healthcare provision considerably reduces the risk of poverty and constitutes an important element for social stability in times of economic difficulties.

Second – we need solidarity – to ensure that Health is for all, and not just for those who can afford it.

Third – we need transparent pricing for health services.

Fourth – we must ensure that information flows follow patients from one healthcare provider to another. This guards against duplication of care.

And fifth – the skills mix within the health workforce must be sufficiently balanced to cover the whole spectrum of people's needs, from primary through to tertiary hospital care. This requires sound and effective planning.

Turning now to the future of health systems, let me float some thoughts for further reflection as to the evolution we can expect in the next years:

- Healthcare systems are likely to evolve away from a hospital-centred structure towards a more decentralised network of smaller community-based units.
- To respond to the challenge of chronic diseases, Health systems would move away from an approach based on “cure” towards a more integrated prevention and care model involving multiple sectors of society and a wider promotion of healthy lifestyles.
- The differentiation between healthcare and other forms of care would diminish leading to greater synergies across the health, social or educational sectors.
- Health systems would become more and more patient-centred – more tailored to individual needs.
- Patients would become more actively involved in healthcare.
- The separation between health professions and specialisations would become less rigid through the creation of multidisciplinary teams.

- More and more attention is likely to be given to cost effective public spending for example, through the use of health technology assessment, market authorisation and pricing of new products subject to reimbursement.
- Questions concerning solidarity (who's covered), the basket of services (what's covered) and co-payment (who pays?) will also remain high on the agenda.
- Innovation and new technologies will play a growing role in care. e-Health and mobile Health applications, personalised medicines, genomics and nanotechnologies are already transforming healthcare and contributing to patient empowerment. To live up to their promises these new technologies will need to be cost effective.
- Finally, health systems will need to find ways to ensure that our commitment to the values of universality, equity, and solidarity, and access to good quality care, continue to be upheld across the European Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenge that lies ahead to design and engineer the health systems of the future is enormous and easily underestimated.

To succeed requires a truly collective effort – and clearly, the business community has a key role to play in this regard.

The producers of health products as well as food and drink manufacturers can actively engage in this process setting long-term and responsible objectives to benefit society as a whole and work in partnership with public health authorities.

Finally, let me assure you that the European Commission remains committed to continuing to do all it can to foster good quality healthcare, accessible to all, on a long-term sustainable basis.

Thank you very much for your attention.