



### World Health Day: Statement by Commissioner Stella Kyriakides

Brussels, 6 April 2021

Since day one of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been clear that collaboration and solidarity offer the surest path out of this crisis and towards healthier and more equal societies. Yet tomorrow, as we celebrate World Health Day, health inequalities remain a daily reality for so many of our citizens in the European Union.

Even before COVID-19 put our health systems and hospitals to the test, access to quality healthcare services was not a given for everyone in the EU. Whilst the pandemic has affected each and every one of us, vulnerable groups in our society have been more exposed to the disease. The measures taken to keep the pandemic under control have had a more detrimental effect on those in already vulnerable positions, including those from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic minorities.

On our side, by joining forces, through the EU Vaccines Strategy, we are ensuring that all Member States have access to safe and effective vaccines, under the same conditions and at the same time, with a clear priority given to the most vulnerable and exposed persons.

Over the past year, we have also been working with Member States to improve access to health services and to mitigate the negative consequences of the pandemic on our health systems. As we are learning from our experience with this crisis, we are laying the foundations for a stronger European Health Union. We will enhance the protection of citizens by supporting Member States to ensure high quality healthcare and making health systems more resilient to face future crises.

With the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe, we will aim to improve access to safe and affordable medicines and treatments to meet all patients' needs. Through Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, we will actively support the efforts to build stronger and more resilient cancer care systems and improve cancer patients' access to healthcare. In particular, we will monitor inequalities in access to cancer prevention and care in order to reduce the currently existing differences for disadvantaged people.

There can be no first and second-class cancer patients in the EU.

With the new EU4Health funding agreed, we have the most ambitious health financing programme ever, and with an unprecedented budget of €5.1 billion, we will now be able to make targeted investments to address inequalities between Member States and improve access, including for our most vulnerable.

Health equality is a guiding principle in our work, not just across the EU but also globally. The pandemic has been a wake-up call for us all, on how interconnected our health is. Through our work to improve our collective capacity to respond to cross-border health threats and building a strong European Health Union we also hope to offer inspiration for global action.

And beyond our own borders, we will continue to support global cooperation on health challenges by supporting COVAX and by helping other countries to make their health systems more responsive and resilient. By doing so, we are clearly committed to improving health, reducing inequalities, increasing protection against global health threats and building a fairer, healthier world for everyone.

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