

EXPERT PANEL ON EFFECTIVE WAYS OF INVESTING IN HEALTH

Request for a scientific opinion: Benchmarking Access to Healthcare in the EU

Background – Rationale

During the economic turbulence of recent years it became clear that some groups within society had very limited access to healthcare, and existing barriers to access were exposed under financial stress. The debate on access to healthcare grew in importance.

In 2015 the five Presidents' report clarified the direction for Europe and gives new content to its objectives, with a stronger focus on social performance. It made clear that Europe's ambition should be to earn a 'social triple A'.

The current Commission action on access to good-quality healthcare takes a number of forms; here are three of the most relevant examples:

- In the European Semester, more and more the Annual Growth Surveys, which set out the EU priorities for the coming year to boost growth and job creation, have acknowledge the importance of access to healthcare. As a result, access to healthcare has gained importance and visibility in the European Semester process and in recommendations to Member States. A growth in importance can also be observed for inequalities, including in health.
- The Expert group on Health System Performance Assessment promotes discussions between EU Member States and international organizations on methodologies and tools to assess the performance of health systems; it has published a report on quality of healthcare and will most probably in the coming years, focus its attention on access to care.
- The Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health, in its opinion on access to health services of 2016, considered how to maximise the added-value of EU action on access to healthcare.

In March 2016 the European Commission launched a broad consultation and put forward a first preliminary outline of what should become the European Pillar of Social Rights. The European Pillar of Social Rights should build on, and complement, the EU social "acquis" in order to guide policies in a number of fields essential for well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems within the participating Member States. The principles proposed do not replace existing rights, but offer a way to assess and in future, approximate for the better the performance of national employment and social policies. Once established, the Pillar should become the reference framework to screen the employment and social

performance of participating Member States, to drive the process of reforms at national level and, more specifically, to serve as a compass for renewed convergence within the euro area. In the Preliminary Draft of the Social Pillar submitted to consultation, a principle on healthcare and sickness benefits is proposed. It states that "Everyone shall have timely access to good quality preventive and curative health care, and the need for healthcare shall not lead to poverty or financial strain".

Access to healthcare is a complex issue. As noted in the opinion of the EXPH on access to health services, "policy responses should reflect the multi-dimensional nature of access problems, the importance of intersectoral action and the specificities of national and regional contexts." The report identified actions in eight policy areas affecting access to healthcare, at national and EU level and concluded that "the policy responses required in a given context will depend, to a large extent, on the current state of the health system." That is the challenge ahead: to use the conclusions of the opinion of the Expert Panel on Access to Health Services and other relevant knowledge to build a framework that can be operationalized and can help guiding the improvement of access to healthcare in EU Member States, taking into consideration the different contexts and the multi-dimensional nature of the challenges.

Terms of Reference for the Expert Panel on Health

The Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in Health is requested to provide its views on Benchmarking Access to Healthcare by:

- (a) *Proposing a quantitative benchmark/target on access to healthcare based on the unmet needs for medical examination indicator. A target for the EU and a target which can be adapted to the context of each Member State should be proposed.*
- (b) *Proposing a qualitative benchmark, based on principles and policy levers and which can be operationalised, to improve access to healthcare in the EU Member States.*
- (c) *Discussing the possible utilization of EU funds and/or other mechanisms to support the improvement of access to healthcare according to the benchmarks proposed.*

Timing

Ideally the opinion of the Panel should be finalised by September 2017.

Enclosures

*Opinion of the EXPH on access to health Services in the European Union
Draft European Pillar of Social Rights
DG EMPL benchmarks currently being discussed in the framework of the Social Pillar
Guidance note on inequalities for the 2017 European Semester
Terms of Reference of Pilot Projects on Access to healthcare
Health at a Glance 2016 – State of health in the EU cycle.*