HEALTH PROGRAMME
EUROPEAN UNION ACTION IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH

What is the health programme?

Good health is a major concern for EU citizens, all the more so in the ongoing major crisis due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The EU contributes to better health protection through its policies and activities, in accordance with Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. However, the EU does not define health policies or the organisation and provision of health services and medical care. Instead, it works to complement national policies and to support cooperation between Member States in the field of public health.

The third programme for EU action in the area of health (2014-2020) is a financial instrument for policy coordination at EU level. It aims to complement, support and add value to the policies of Member States aimed at improving the health of their citizens and reducing health inequalities, encouraging innovation in health and increasing the sustainability of health systems. The programme has four specific objectives:

1. to promote health and healthy living and prevent disease;
2. to protect EU citizens from serious cross-border health threats;
3. to contribute to innovative, efficient and sustainable health systems;
4. to facilitate access to better and safer healthcare for EU citizens.

Specific objectives

- Identify, disseminate and promote the uptake of evidence-based and good practices for cost-effective health promotion and disease prevention measures by addressing in particular the key lifestyle-related risk factors, with a focus on EU added value.
- Identify and develop coherent approaches and promote their implementation for better preparedness and coordination in health emergencies.
- Identify and develop tools and mechanisms at EU level to address shortages of resources, both human and financial, and to facilitate the voluntary uptake of innovations in public health intervention and prevention strategies.
- Increase access to medical expertise and information for specific conditions beyond national borders, facilitate the application of the results of research, and develop tools for the improvement of healthcare quality and patient safety.

Why is it necessary?

The programme focuses on fostering the exchange of best practices between Member States and supporting networks for knowledge sharing or mutual learning. Moreover, actions are undertaken to address cross-border health threats, to reduce risks and mitigate consequences. The health programme addresses issues relating to the internal market, where the EU has substantial legitimacy to ensure high-quality solutions across Member States and targets actions unlocking the potential of innovation in health. It promotes actions that could lead to a system of benchmarking or improving economies of scale by avoiding waste due to duplication and by optimising the use of financial resources.

Outlook for the 2021–2027 period

The programme will continue as the EU4Health programme, a new and stand-alone financial instrument that will provide a solid basis for coordinated EU action and an unprecedented EU investment in health. The programme will ensure continuity with the work done under the 2014–2020 multiannual financial framework.

Budget implementation (in million EUR)

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<th>EXECUTED COMMITMENTS</th>
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<td>66.4</td>
<td>56.1</td>
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<td>68.3</td>
<td>62.9</td>
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<td>72.4</td>
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Where are we in the implementation?

- As of the first quarter of 2021, 100% of the allocated budget (EUR 452.3 million for the 2014-2020 period) had been committed through projects and other actions pursuing the programme’s objectives; 67% of the total budget (i.e. EUR 305.3 million) had been paid to participants/beneficiaries or for the procurement of services necessary for the implementation of the programme. Outstanding payments (33% of the budget, or EUR 147 million) account for projects or actions launched in the last 2-3 years which are not yet completed and therefore have not led to final payments by the Commission.

Performance assessment

- The midterm evaluation of the third health programme, carried out in 2017, concluded that its implementation was on track. Its major achievements included the creation of 24 European reference networks, support for Member States to increase their capacity building for responding to outbreaks (such as the outbreaks of the Ebola and Zika viruses), contributing to the EU’s migration policy by supporting Member States in responding to the health needs of a high influx of migrants and refugees, and the training of health professionals and other frontline staff.

- The experience from the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that the EU must improve health systems so that they are ready to provide state-of-the-art services and care and are prepared to cope with epidemics and other unforeseeable challenges. Overall, the crisis has highlighted the fragility of national and local health systems and the need for coordinated, strong action at EU level to complement the health policies of the Member States. These challenges will be addressed in the new EU4Health programme.

- While reorienting and gearing a portion of its resources towards fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the health programme continued the implementation of its main actions with a view to enhancing and further consolidating key achievements over the implementation period of 2014 to 2020.

- As for the general objective of the programme, the indicator shows that the general health of EU citizens has improved, which is demonstrated by the number of healthy life years expected at birth.

- Trends are positive for most indicators. The decrease seen in the indicator concerning the number of Member States in which the European accreditation scheme for breast cancer services is implemented can be explained by the fact that, in 2019, developers of guidelines and/or national authorities of (only) six Member States used, implemented or adapted their national cancer plans in view of the EU guidelines, EU evidence base or methodology developed by the European Commission initiative on breast cancer, coordinated by the Joint Research Centre. Some indicators only show major progress in 2020 (e.g. the indicator on the number of health technology assessments and the indicator on the number of healthcare providers and centres of expertise joining European reference networks).

Concrete examples of achievements

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<tr>
<th>24</th>
<th>1 185</th>
<th>EUR 6.9 million</th>
<th>23</th>
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<td>European reference networks established (involving healthcare providers across Europe) with the aim of tackling complex or rare medical diseases or conditions that require highly specialised treatment and a concentration of knowledge and resources.</td>
<td>healthcare providers and centres of expertise have joined the European reference networks.</td>
<td>in EU contributions to the Joint Action on Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare-Associated Infections, which supports EU Member States in developing and implementing effective ‘one health’ action plans against antimicrobial resistance and healthcare-associated infections.</td>
<td>Member States using the tools and mechanisms identified in order to contribute to effective results in their health systems, addressing shortages of resources, both human and financial, and facilitating the voluntary uptake of innovations in public health intervention and prevention strategies.</td>
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