European Public Health News

In this European Public Health news, health is put at the centre of society as it is impacting us from birth until death. Jakab emphasizes the importance of investing in health over the life-course, whilst McKee demonstrates that the whole society impacts health. A strong, unified health care system and seeing healthy people as the cornerstone of healthy economies is the key message in the contribution by Andriukaitis, the newly elected EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety. Making the voice of public health visible, both nationally and internationally and facilitating a strong and unified voice is what Zeegers and Barnhoorn see as the core activities of EUPHA and the EPH Conference Foundation.

Dineke Zeegers Paget
EUPHA Executive Director

President’s Column

A new year is a time for both reflection and anticipation. Reflection on what has gone well, or not so well in the past year and anticipation of the challenges and opportunities we will face in the year ahead.

For EUPHA, we have much to celebrate from the past year and much to look forward to in 2015. In my last column, I wrote about our conference in Glasgow, where a combination of excellent organization and outstanding content created an event that will be remembered for many years. Now we are looking forward to Milan, with a programme that promises to be every bit as imaginative and informative. One of the streams will be on communication and advocacy in public health, something that I am particularly looking forward to, given its importance in making the world a better place. We have a new President Elect, Natasha Muscat, who is already making an invaluable contribution to our work, stimulating our thinking about how we can take EUPHA to ever greater heights. We also have a new website and logo, two things among many for which we are grateful to Dineke and her team. We continue to benefit from the creativity and hard work of our pillar leads, while thanking in particular Antoine Flahault, who has stepped down as pillar lead for training and education. I particularly enjoy the meetings of our section council, with the quality of the discussion a testament to the massive (and sadly often under-exploited) pool of public health talent in Europe.

Unfortunately, the situation is less rosy when we look beyond EUPHA. We now know that life expectancy for older people actually fell in many European countries between 2011and 2012. We have seen reversals in the long term declines in suicide and unmet need for health care. Austerity policies continue, with many governments seemingly oblivious to the damage they have done to both health and economic recovery. Meanwhile, in one of Europe’s largest countries, Ukraine, the conflict that, as I write, has led to the deaths of at least 5000 people, continues with no prospect of peace.

There are, however, some things that offer some hope. Regardless of one’s political views, the election in Greece has at least stimulated debate about the dominant view that there is no alternative to the failed policies of austerity, a debate that is achieving traction in other countries such as Spain. The tragic events in Paris in January provoked an outpouring of solidarity that bridged religious divides. Among the victims of the gunmen were three people of Tunisian descent, one Christian, one Jewish and one Muslim, while several customers in the Jewish supermarket were saved by the actions of a young Muslim man. Those of us, including myself, who stood in French towns and cities with signs saying ‘Je suis Charlie’ have sent out a clear message that we will not allow anyone, whether populist politicians or religious fundamentalists, to divide us.

There are also signs of real progress. To many people’s surprise, an English health minister announced that her government would legislate for standardized tobacco packaging. This is a move that is rapidly gathering momentum across Europe, despite the efforts of the tobacco industry, now repeating the tactics it used to oppose bans on smoking in public places, with its lies and lobbying, backed up by research designed to mislead rather than inform. I hope that all of our members will do what they can to persuade their governments to follow suit. We can also look forward to a debate on how to strengthen the global health architecture. The many failings in the international response to Ebola have served as a wakeup call.

We have many challenges ahead, but also some important opportunities. The one thing we can promise is that EUPHA will do what it can to shape the solutions, for the benefit of all the populations we serve.

Martin McKee
EUPHA president

EUPHA office column

Our new president, Martin McKee, formulates it well: EUPHA will do what it can to shape the solutions, for the benefit of all the populations we serve. And yes, EUPHA will do what it can, but what can EUPHA do? The first task that EUPHA can do and has done so successfully in the past is to facilitate access to knowledge. The EPH Conferences are organized annually and provide a wonderful market of research, policy and practice. The European Journal of Public Health is another flagship of EUPHA with peer-reviewed research articles. The EUPHA newsletter reaches about 14 000 readers. Facilitating access to knowledge and information remains an important task for EUPHA.

EUPHA is quickly developing its second task, which is to actively work towards solutions, to voice concerns from the public health community and to help build policy. Here, we rely on our theme-specific sections and our Four Pillar networks, and on our ongoing collaboration with other NGOs in Europe and international organizations. EUPHA has been an active partner in initiatives from other NGOs, for example EPHA, and we also support the evidence approach of WHO Europe, especially when it concerns the fight against tobacco. In the new strategy, this second task is further developed.

The third task, EUPHA will be more focused on, is to appreciate, support and advertise the efforts of our members. Several of our members have a long-time experience in voicing concerns and help shape solutions for the benefit of the national population. Other members would like to (further) develop this skill. EUPHA has a role to play here. To create national voices, to support the national voices, to provide the national voices with tools to increase the visibility of their actions. The new website is a first step in this direction: national voices are offered a possibility to showcase their successes, their activities. Another step in this direction was at the initiative of the French Society of Public Health who is now—with the assistance of EUPHA—working to put health visibly on the agenda of the Climate change summit organized in Paris at the end of this year.

In the past, there were discussions on whether EUPHA is THE voice or A voice in public health in Europe. In present times, where the public health community needs to stand strong, I believe that EUPHA can be all the voice, a voice and the microphone that lets all voices be heard.

Dineke Zeegers Paget
EUPHA Executive Director
The full-length version of this article is available online.

Introduction

This is the sixth in my series of articles for the European Journal of Public Health, in which I discuss the importance of investing in health over the life-course.

The life-course approach

A life-course approach looks at the life experiences of individuals, cohorts or generations, and the interaction with the determinants of diseases, shaped by the wider social, economic and cultural context. The life-course approach is intrinsic to the study of health inequalities.

Improvements in maternal health and a decrease in maternal and child mortality hide the discrepancies and inequalities between countries and between different population groups. High-quality maternity services, parenting programmes, childcare and early years education for all are needed to diminish social gradients. Health promotion and good access to primary health care, as well as the timely management of non-communicable diseases, are vital. The new policy ‘Investing in children: the European child and adolescent health strategy, 2015–20’ (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/253729/64wd12e_InvestCAHstrategy_140440.pdf?ua=1) provides a regional framework for action.


A multisectoral approach


Conclusion: from research to practise

A life-course approach is key to the prevention and control of ill health and diseases and to reducing health inequalities. It is therefore an important step in the implementation of Health 2020. These issues will be explored further at the forthcoming WHO European Ministerial Conference on life-course approaches in the context of Health 2020, to be held in Minsk in October 2015.

Zsuzsanna Jakab
WHO Regional Director
WHO Regional Office for Europe
HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY: ‘PROMOTION, PROTECTION AND PREVENTION’

Vytenis Andriukaitis, EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety since November 2014, sets out his health priorities

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Health protection and access to preventive, diagnostic and curative healthcare regardless of financial means, gender or nationality is enshrined in the EU Treaty and Charter of Fundamental Rights. I will uphold this principle and make it my mission to ensure that everyone living in the EU has access to quality healthcare.

I have taken up my mandate following a long, deep economic crisis that has affected all EU countries to various degrees. Budget cuts, coupled with an ageing population, a rise in chronic diseases, costly technological developments and high patient expectations, are compromising Member States’ capacity to provide high-quality healthcare for all. Health and growth are interdependent, they go hand in hand. Healthy people are the cornerstone of healthy economies.

During the next few years, I intend to do everything in my power to secure that health remains high on the EU agenda. My priorities can be summarized with three words: promotion, protection and prevention.

Promotion

With the multiple challenges facing Europe’s health systems, my first priority is to ensure that Member States receive quality, tailored advice and help from the EU. Member States need to make their health systems more cost efficient and results oriented, and I firmly believe the EU can help. In 2015, I intend to further develop the knowledge of the health situation in each EU country to identify priority areas for action. In parallel, the Commission will continue to develop expertise on health system performance assessment and health technology assessment to help Europe’s health systems become more cost-effective and resilient.

Protection

I place great importance on ensuring that the EU is in a position to protect citizens against cross border health threats. EU crisis preparedness and management tools need to be fit for purpose. The ongoing Ebola crisis in West Africa illustrates the importance of this. I also count increasing antimicrobial resistance amongst the most serious of cross-border health threats and intend to continue to tackle this issue from all sides. Finally, as a medical doctor by profession, I want to ensure that recent EU legislation, such as the Directive on patients’ rights in cross border healthcare, and the Decision on cross border health threats actually deliver benefits to citizens.

Prevention

Many chronic diseases and related expenditure are preventable. Therefore, I will urge EU countries to invest in disease prevention and more effective disease management to improve people’s health and avoid higher costs down the line. I will develop a strong approach to preventing chronic diseases focusing on alcohol related harm, tobacco control, nutrition and physical activity. I intend to work with Member States using all tools available—EU and national—to trigger improvements and, as such, to help reduce inequalities in health across the EU.

Vytenis Andriukaitis
EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

European Journal of Public Health

Preparations for the 8th EPH Conference, to be held from 14 to 17 October 2015, in Milan are in full swing. The EPH Conference will be held in conjunction with the 48th Annual Congress of the Italian Society of Hygiene, Preventive Medicine and Public Health (‘Sti’), creating the largest public health event in Europe. We expect to welcome more than 2000 delegates to both conferences. Both events are held in the ultra-modern Milano Congressi (MiCo), only a few metro stops from the centre of Milan and the world exhibition ‘Expo Milano 2015’. The world exhibition takes place at the same time as both conferences, making it almost impossible not to visit Milan and attend the EPH Conference.

Especially, as the theme of Expo Milano 2015 ‘Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life’ is close to the heart of the members of the public health community. The Expo intends to raise awareness about the contradictions of our world. At the same time, there those who suffer from ailments linked to poor nutrition and those who have too much food. For these reasons, we need to make conscious political choices, develop sustainable and healthy lifestyles, and use the best technology to create a balance between the availability and the consumption of resources.

Meanwhile, the EPH Conference is inviting abstracts for workshops and single presentations (oral, pitch and posters). The programme offers the traditional 10-min presentations and poster presentations in the designated poster area. Following the successful introduction in Glasgow, we will increase the number of pitch presentation sessions in Milan. Pitch presentations are 5-min, with 2 min of discussion time in 60-min sessions.

All abstracts will be peer-reviewed by the International Scientific Committee with 60 public health experts from 28 countries. Workshops will be reviewed based on the criteria for single presentation abstracts as well as on their added value for the programme. We aim to have each proposal reviewed by five reviewers. Applicants will be notified of the acceptance of their abstract by the mid June 2015.

Earlier 2015, the Glasgow Declaration ‘All Hands On Deck’ was published for wider distribution in the public health and policy making communities. The Glasgow Declaration summarizes the discussions and provides solutions to move forward in reducing health inequalities. The evidence on health inequalities presented at the EPH Conference was overwhelming and several promising examples were presented. The time has come to act. See http://ephconference.org/conference-glasgow-2014-149.

Floris Barnhoorn
Deputy Director, EPH Conference Office

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