

EU Public Health Policies

State of play, current and future challenges

The [original full study](#)¹ presents an outlook on the **topics that may shape the public health agenda of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety**, during the legislative term of 2019-2024. It provides a description of **some of the key policy developments and future challenges**, drawing, among others, on guidance documents for the new Commission. It also analyses **other relevant health themes and challenges** which are not mentioned among Commission priorities, ranging from health systems to disease prevention.

Background

Public health is most commonly defined as the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society. The aim of public health policy is to **create the enabling conditions for people to maintain their health, improve health and well-being, and prevent ill-health or the deterioration of their health**.



That is particularly relevant in the current context, where, while nearly 10% of the EU's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is spent on healthcare and life expectancy is on the rise, Europeans on average spend still between almost a quarter and a fifth of their lives with a disability, and just in the year of 2013 more than 1.2 million people in the EU died from illnesses and injuries that might have been avoided. The burden of ill-health and premature mortality falls disproportionately on people exposed to socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Key findings

In addition to a number of **ongoing legislative procedures of relevance for public health**, which are listed in the study, the paper finds that **most of the overarching priorities highlighted in the Political Guidelines for the 2019-2024 Commission**, like tackling climate change, ensuring a just and equality-oriented transition, pursuing a zero-pollution ambition, developing an ethics-based digital future and enhancing the inclusiveness and integrity of policy-making, **are closely linked to public health challenges**. The **Mission Letter to the Commissioner-designate for Health** describes several priorities the new President of the Commission has committed to pursue.

- The **supply of affordable medicines**; the review of the orphan and paediatrics legislation, incentives for biomedical research and development, and medicines shortages; tackling **vaccine hesitancy**; and the implementation of the two regulations on **medical devices** are amongst the priorities.
- **Digital transformation of healthcare and society**, making use of the opportunities offered by e-health and prioritising the creation of a **European Health Data Space** will also be pivotal. The challenges are many, ranging from the **ethical and equity implications of digitalisation**, m-health, through data privacy and ownership, Artificial Intelligence, digital marketing, to the wider implications of digitalisation for health systems, including the evolution of personalised medicine.

Check out the [original full study](#) by scanning this QR code!



- **Tackling antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** remains high on the political agenda. Ensuring the **implementation of the 'EU One Health Action Plan against AMR'** and working towards a global agreement on antimicrobials; and supporting the **effective implementation of national AMR action plans**, which Member States committed to in the framework of the WHO, will be key here.
- A **comprehensive plan to fight cancer**, covering all stages of the disease from prevention to palliative care, is expected. Challenges related to the prevention of cancers are closely linked to those of the other major **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** as they share a limited number of main risk factors; considering the vast burden of NCDs, a synergistic approach to tackling cancer and other NCDs, as well as **obesity**, may be explored.
- **Transforming the food system** is not only a challenge but an opportunity as well, considering how the food system affects multiple health dimensions, including nutrition, food safety, climate, AMR, air quality, chemical safety, biodiversity and socio-economic determinants. **Improving consumer information** on food products, covering themes such as claims and simplified front-of-pack nutrition declarations, is another priority which is deeply embedded within the food and health nexus. The **'Farm to Fork Strategy'** will encompass these aspects.
- The **'zero pollution' ambition** has a clear health element, and foresees action on, among others, **endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs)** and **air quality**. Addressing EDCs fits also within the wider expectation of an EU strategy on a **non-toxic environment**.
- **Promoting health equity** is a foundation of public health; though socio-economic policies usually fall under the responsibility of other committees, the ENVI Committee might want to consider its close involvement in the relevant files. According to the Political Guidelines for the upcoming Commission and relevant Mission Letters, a range of actions can be expected in this domain, including on the **European Semester**, the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, the **Child Guarantee**, as well as action on **gender**, minimum wage, unemployment and work-life balance. Special health focus is also warranted to the **demographic transition**, especially considering the ageing of the European population and that healthy ageing starts from childhood.
- The ENVI Committee's engagement on **international trade and investment agreements** and the EU's approach to **global health** may provide significant added value for public health. The same applies to **ensuring adequate funding allocations in the EU budget for the effective pursuit of health and health equity objectives**; this is of particular relevance as the current Health Programme will, in the next programming period, be merged into a wider European Social Fund Plus.
- **Other health policy topics are likely to be raised, stemming from the evaluation of key pieces of legislation** such as the EU blood, tissues and cells legislation, and **following the discussion on the renewal or introduction of EU action plans and strategies**. **Regular reports** will be due on various pieces of EU health legislation, notably on tobacco, cross-border healthcare, professional qualifications and in the area of chemicals.
- Monitoring the EU's preparedness and response to **cross-border threats to health**, and the effects of **Brexit**, particularly in a 'no deal' scenario, will be important. The new Commission pledges for **improved policy-making and greater transparency** in all areas. Likewise, the challenge of **channelling the voices of citizens and civil society** into policy-making remains.



¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/638426/IPOL_STU\(2019\)638426_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/638426/IPOL_STU(2019)638426_EN.pdf)

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