

EU health programme for 2014 to 2020

The EU's health strategy is largely implemented through multiannual health programmes. The latest programme aims to support and complement Member State (MS) efforts to cope with economic and demographic challenges facing their healthcare systems and help citizens stay healthy longer.

Population health

While life expectancy in the EU has been increasing over recent decades, reaching around 77 years for men and 83 for women in 2011, the average number of [healthy life years](#) was estimated at 61.8 for men and 62.2 for women. Chronic diseases pose a particular challenge to healthcare systems and to the EU [aim](#) of increasing the number of years spent in good health by two years by 2020. According to the [European Public Health Alliance](#) (EPHA), dealing with chronic diseases accounts for around €700 billion annually – some 70%-80% of the EU's healthcare costs. Population health differs significantly amongst MS, as well as between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

Healthcare is one of the largest sectors of the EU economy, accounting for around 10% of gross domestic product and [employing](#) 8% of the total European workforce. Promoting good health is fundamental to the Europe 2020 [smart and inclusive growth](#) objectives and increasing the number of healthy life years is considered essential if the EU is to achieve its aim of [employing 75%](#) of the working-age population by 2020.

The 2014-20 programme

On 9 November 2011, the European Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a third multiannual programme of EU action in the field of health, the "[Health for Growth Programme](#)", to run from 2014 to 2020. This put greater emphasis on the link between a healthy population and economic growth than earlier programmes. Focused on creating EU added value, the programme aims to support MS efforts to boost innovation, increase access to better and safer healthcare, promote good health and prevent disease (especially with respect to the key risk factors of smoking, alcohol abuse, obesity and HIV/AIDS), and protect citizens from cross-border health threats. The budget proposed was €446 million (current prices).

Stakeholders

The EPHA and the European Patients' Forum expressed [concern](#) over the programme's focus and said that health should not be seen "solely as a tool to promote growth" but rather that innovation and growth should deliver a healthier population. The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations welcomed the Commission proposal while suggesting a number of [amendments](#) including greater patient empowerment through the strengthening of health literacy. The [European Heart Network](#) expressed concern at the lack of a specific reference to nutrition and physical activity, and the [European COPD Coalition](#) called for respiratory issues to feature prominently in all aspects of the future programme.

European Parliament

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (rapporteur: Françoise Grossetête, EPP, France) adopted a [report](#) in June 2012 which proposed changing the name of the programme to "Health and Growth for Citizens" programme. It also included calls for a specific focus on age-related diseases, such as neurodegenerative diseases and other chronic illnesses, and for sufficient resources to fulfil existing and future priorities. MEPs also called for the budget to be distributed between objectives according to their likely advantages for citizens' health. In November 2013, Parliament, Council and the Commission reached a [compromise agreement](#), which includes a slight increase in the total budget to [€449.4 million](#) (current prices) in the context of the new [Multiannual Financial Framework](#). They also agreed a more neutral title – "the third programme of Union action in the field of health (2014-20)".

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