

PRESS RELEASE

European Health Forum Gastein 2018 challenges experts to think big and make bold political choices for Agenda 2030

- *Future of health in Europe from all perspectives under experts' spotlight at the 21st European Health Forum Gastein*
- *European event calls for the financial community and financial markets to engage on sustainable health agenda.*
- *Awards announced: European Health Award 2018 bestowed upon the European Cancer Concord, first EHFG Hackathon delivers innovative solution to prevent alcohol-related injuries and deaths among young people*

Bad Hofgastein, Austria, 5 October 2018 – The 21st edition of the European Health Forum Gastein, an event on the Austria EU presidency calendar, concluded today with 600 leading health policy experts agreeing on the need to set bold political choices for health system sustainability in Europe. Experts acknowledged the necessity to avoid reversing the strides achieved in improving the health of Europeans and raised concerns about the possible impact of the 2019 European elections on Europe's health agenda.

“Health and Sustainable Development – bold political choices for Agenda 2030” was the broad theme that set the scene for forward-looking and solution-oriented discussions involving the European Commission, civil society representatives, key opinion leaders from the academic world, and private sector stakeholders from the pharmaceutical industry and beyond. Riina Sikkut, Estonia's Minister of Health and Labour explained that Estonia is ‘thinking big’ as her ministry is accounts for over 40% of the total state budget. The country is also working towards establishing a gene bank of 10% of the population by the end of 2018, which will help make more accurate predictions around the need for medicines and care. Josep Figueras, Director of the European Observatory on Health Systems & Policies and head of the WHO European Centre on Health Policy in Brussels laid down the challenge: “Think big, be bold, be practical.”

The sense that in Europe health and innovation are at a turning point featured strongly throughout the sessions. EHFG President, Dr Clemens Martin Auer pointed out that “the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have shaped a powerful discourse that might, for the first time, withstand the dominant narratives of competitiveness, stock markets and the demand for low cost goods”. He added that the European Single Market cannot be successful without health, and that there is therefore an imperative need for a strong health dossier at the EU-level of decision-making.

Participants addressed practical health problems, for instance around the challenge of ensuring a skilled workforce for health. The full programme encouraged frank discussions on more sensitive topics as well, from access to medicines and the high costs of innovative therapies, to the need to address the commercial determinants of health in addition to the economic and social determinants

of health. Several speakers highlighted the mostly untapped opportunity of engaging the global financial markets in this regard. Bringing a new perspective to mainly health policy focus, new speaker this year contributed views to help better understand how health can be seen as an investment rather than a cost, Finland's Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Finance, Martti Hetemäki told delegates that "finance and health need to work together". But he emphasised that the initial priority of governments should be on ensuring that money is spent in the right places.

Far away from their usual city settings, critical questions were addressed, incisive on-the-spot analyses of Europe's core health concerns, prompting new avenues to explore. According to the conference participants, and as discussed at the EHFG last year, ensuring that health is addressed in All Policies (HiAP) and in all Politics has to guide the political choices of the future. Speakers and delegates underscored the importance and the cost on the economy of healthy and active ageing throughout the lifecycle and health at work. More needs to be done to equip primary healthcare professionals, especially nurses and occupational health physicians, and help them become a pillar of health system sustainability. Furthermore, EHFG President, Dr Clemens Martin Auer highlighted how important it is to inspire a new, young generation of people to enter the health profession.

Critical reflections notwithstanding, there was optimism about the political-will to tackle the challenges to achieving sustainable health, and especially about the wide spectrum of opportunities available to render health systems more sustainable and interoperable. The power of data to foster clinical benefits and patient-reported outcomes, and to manage systems more effectively and reduce wasteful expenditure was seen as key in supporting health system sustainability. However, this would require making major leaps forward in linking up different data sets and sources of healthcare.

Sessions on digital health underlined that Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers an opportunity to focus on the needs of a single patient, rather than on a cohort of patients. AI should be primarily seen as an enabler of digitalisation, which is the real game-changer for health. Issues such as linking data sets needed to be addressed for AI to play a role in ensuring rapid diagnosis and better outcomes for patients. Stakeholders consequently proposed elements to ensure Europe can reap the benefits of AI, like investing in technology uptake and trust-building, but also raising awareness among innovators about how AI can work for health, while encouraging professionals to work with innovations.

The EHFG hackathon, organised jointly with EIT Health, contributed bold and innovative ways forward for one of Europe's health challenges: how to prevent injuries and deaths caused by alcohol misuse among young people. After 36 hours of brainstorming and discussing, five teams, consisting of 5 people from in total 18 countries, came up with concrete project proposals to effectively tackle this issue. The winning team came up with a chatbot solution, "GoBot – Your Going Out Buddy", which aims to build a support platform for young people going out partying to ensure they will stay connected to their friends and get home safely.

Dorli Kahr-Gottlieb, Secretary General of EHFG reflecting on this year's edition said "We encouraged our speakers and our participants to think big for health in Europe, to discuss bold political decisions, and to dare to image a health paradigm shift to make our systems future proof. It is inspiring to see what new ideas came about."

Note to the editors

Several reports were launched at the European Health Forum Gastein 2018, including:

- European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies - [Austria HiT \(2018\)](#)

- RAND Corporation - [Assessing the Preparedness of the Health Care System Infrastructure in Six European Countries for an Alzheimer's Treatment](#)
- Vital Transformation - [Better Science, Better Health: Supporting IP in Europe](#)

About the European Health Forum Gastein

The European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) was founded in 1998 as a European health policy conference. It aims to provide a platform for all stakeholders from the field of health and beyond. Over the past decade, the EHFG has established itself as an indispensable institution in the scope of European health policy. It has made a decisive contribution to the development of guidelines and above all the cross-border exchange of experience, information and cooperation. Leading experts participate in the annual conference held in the Gastein Valley in the Austrian Alps for three days in October.