

## PRESS POINT – LET’S THINK BIG

Wednesday 3 October 2018

Today’s EHFG press point was themed “Health in Europe – Let’s think big”. It set out to explore what is needed to safeguard health in Europe, especially in light of the upcoming European elections and the subsequent institutional change-over with likely consequences for the position of health on the European policy agenda. The press point additionally touched upon what Europe needs to do to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

### **Riina Sikkut – Minister of Health and Labour, Estonia**

*“Estonia is not just a digital health nation, but a digital society in general. The demographics of the Estonian society are changing which requires innovation. The health system has to move with people.*

*In order to think big, we need more cooperation within the European Union and on an international level. This means pooling data and expertise, as well as building public trust in electronic services. The first step will be the exchange of digital prescriptions across borders and we are looking to take this first step together with Finland this year. In addition, we have to make sure that systems are interoperable.*

*Looking into the future, we are focusing on better using genetic data and to bring genomic science to everyday medical practices by 2025 in view of tackling existing health inequalities.*

*Let’s think big, but let’s start tomorrow by taking small steps to achieve big goals.”*

### **Zsuzsanna Jakab – Regional Director, WHO Regional Office Europe**

*“We are very happy with the choice of the main theme of the EHFG 2018 because we need bold political commitment at the highest level. There are four important issues that require thinking big: health at the centre of sustainable development, true political commitment at the highest levels, coherent and integrated policies, and the protection of European values like solidarity, equity, and health as a human right.*

*We are happy to see how many European countries have embraced the SDGs and we can already see three success stories of European health. If progress continues, certain SDG targets will be reached five years ahead of the deadline. Some success that already has been achieved: life expectancy increase by one year; overall mortality reduced by 25%; premature mortality reduced.*

*However, Europe has the highest alcohol and tobacco consumption rates of all six WHO regions, obesity rates are very high and we are absolutely not on track on HIV.*

*Moreover, 8% of Europe’s population cannot pay their everyday living expenses because of out of pocket health expenditures. This is a clear example of how closely linked the SDGs are, in this case the goals for health and poverty.”*

### **Martin Seychell - Deputy Director General, DG SANTE, European Commission**

*“We have to think big on the SDGs, which are high on the agenda of the European Commission. The SDGs are also the best possible agenda to shape the EU’s role in global health. The Commission acknowledges that health is a national competence*

*but aims to support Member States and facilitate multi-country cooperation.*

*Among the biggest challenges are Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and low vaccination rates in the EU. The Commission is looking at addressing health in all policies by identifying the root causes of the pressure on health systems. This is what the European Commission does in its country-specific recommendations. The issue of AMR is often underestimated, while it is growing faster than climate change, but the EU is the only global region with a one-health AMR action plan. Furthermore, the low vaccination rates, the increase and exporting of measles and rubella cases is an embarrassing concern for the EU.*

*Tobacco consumption still causes a lot of deaths which would be easily preventable. On novel tobacco products specifically, the legislation is very clear. It underscores the need for a cautious approach, places strong emphasis on addiction prevention, and it allows Member States to prohibit products on a case by case basis.*

*We do not need to worry at all about the health dossier in Europe. If anything, the Commission is increasingly recognizing that health is absolutely central to achieving economic and social goals.”*