

PRESS RELEASE

The European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) 2020 inspires innovative ideas to advance Europe's healthy recovery from the coronavirus pandemic

- Over 650 health policy experts and public health enthusiasts from across Europe joined this year's digital European Health Forum Gastein (30 Sept - 2 Oct 2020) and explored how we can build more resilient healthcare systems and societies while reconceptualising economic growth and well-being.
- Ministers, and representatives from EU institutions and the World Health Organization reflected on the individual and collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed how to emerge out of the crisis stronger, together.

2 October 2020, Bad Hofgastein, Austria – With the last sessions concluding this afternoon, the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) 2020 is looking back at three exciting digital conference days under the theme of *“Dancing with elephants - New partnerships for health, democracy, business”*. As this year's Forum was held against the backdrop of the biggest health crisis of modern times, it witnessed visionary discussions geared at transforming our current health and economic systems. Over 650 health experts from governments, civil society, academia, and business participated in over 20 workshops and plenary discussions, focusing on Europe's biggest public health challenges.

Discussions at the EHFG 2020 were marked by two overarching themes which are both indispensable for a strong and united recovery of Europe. These are the interlinked relationship between health and economic growth, and the value of multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder partnerships. As underscored by Sandra Gallina, Acting Director General for Health and Food Safety at the European Commission: *“Investing in health is [...] a preliminary condition to any economic growth”*. A healthy and sustainable recovery from the coronavirus pandemic will only be possible by addressing health *and* economic growth in tandem, while engaging with all sectors of society. The fight against Covid-19 and the rising *“pandemic fatigue”* cannot be overcome by any single actor, but rather require multi-stakeholder efforts and *“clear political leadership”*, as emphasised by Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe. Expertise and action from the health work force, the care sector, scientists, governments, the private sector, and patients are needed to effectively tackle Covid-19.

Keynote speakers and participants at the EHFG also addressed one of the most controversial topics in healthcare, one that has been further amplified by the pandemic, namely access to healthcare services and medicines. While the private sector is inarguably an essential partner in public health, speakers highlighted the need to find a new way to support a strong innovative industry, while also ensuring that innovation is accessible and affordable for patients. As Colin Crouch of the Max Planck Institute put it powerfully: *“The pandemic gives us a chance to rediscover the evils of inequality and the need for shared collective action.”*

Ministers and high-level representatives from EU Member States as well as from the World Health Organization, the European Commission and the European Parliament also reflected in detail on the lessons learnt from the pandemic. They shared their aspirations for a European Health Data Space, discussed the concept of a European Cancer Dashboard, and ultimately

outlined their vision for a European Health Union which will be essential for health system resilience and future pandemic preparedness.

As Clemens Martin Auer, President of the EHFG, poignantly put it: *“COVID-19 has disrupted every aspect of the life we have previously known. It has changed the way we live, socialise, work, travel, and seek healthcare. I am confident, however, that the pandemic has created a momentum for real and sustainable change. We now have the prospect to re-think and transform health policy-making and multilateralism at its core.”*

Dorli Kahr-Gottlieb, Secretary General of the EHFG, expressed that, despite the challenges in 2020, it was extremely important for the EHFG to once again provide the platform for a meaningful, inspiring exchange between the most important decision-makers in European health policy.

For any questions, please contact the press office at press@ehfg.org or +32 2 321 90 16.

About 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 fields of public health and healthcare, 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 late September/ early October, which in 2020 will be replaced by a digital format due to the current situation surrounding COVID-19.