

The EU4Health 2021 Work Programme – a missed opportunity to support European health NGOs to play their key role in the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

On Friday 18 June 2021, the European Commission published its 2021-2022 annual work programme for the landmark EU4Health programme.

The undersigned civil society organisations welcome the ambitious budget of EUR 312 million for crisis preparedness, disease prevention, health systems, the healthcare workforce, and digitalisation setting a record new level of EU investment in the area of health, which the organisations had actively campaigned for in the past years.

However, we deeply regret that the operating grant mechanism for European health and patient NGOs has been discontinued, despite this mechanism having explicitly been included in the [EU4Health programme](#) and in the [Financial regulation](#). The unilateral decision by the European Commission to abandon this type of operational funding in the 2021 Work Plan will have a detrimental impact on the ability of organisations to contribute meaningfully to implement the objectives of the EU4Health programme and to promote networking, capacity building, and the exchange of good practices between national organisations and associations.

In addition, there is concern that the 2021-2022 work programme will further diminish opportunities for NGOs to contribute, as a result of the small number of calls for action grants open to NGOs and the narrow scope of thematic areas covered.

This development comes despite clear feedback received during the stakeholder consultation phase and calls by a broad coalition of health and patient NGOs in recent months, seeking assurances that the EU4Health programme would continue to support key activities and programmes of NGOs through operating grants, and highlighting the profoundly negative effect the discontinuation of this funding would have on the public health activities, networking, advocacy and capacity building of NGOs at a European and national level.

We are grateful to the 56 MEPs who signed an [open letter](#) to Commissioner Kyriakides on 2 June supporting our campaign and urging the Commission to reconsider its position on the matter.

Our organisations have difficulty in understanding why the Commission would take an action that will fundamentally undermine the capacity and long term contribution of health NGOs, in the midst of an unparalleled global health crisis. European NGOs bring added value to the EU by providing essential support to people living in Europe, patient organisations and health NGOs at national level during the

COVID-19 pandemic, despite services and funding being severely affected. This decision by the Commission, despite a significant increase in the budget of the dedicated health programme, risks undermining this vital work and support.

Furthermore, we note the irony that before the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, European health NGOs played a pivotal role in continuing to advocate and communicate the needs of the most vulnerable in society, whilst continually pressing for greater action in health policy at an EU level, particularly when the place of health as a European policy issue was threatened in the 2017 White Paper on the Future of Europe.

Our organisations therefore call on HaDEA/the European Commission:

As part of the 2021 calls for proposals, to:

- Ensure that a broader range of calls are opened up to allow for applications and contributions from NGOs;

As part of the 2022 Work Programme to:

- Restore Operating Grants as a financing mechanism to provide a strong foundation for the contribution of NGOs;
- Ensure that a broader range of calls are opened up to allow for applications and contributions from NGOs;
- Engage meaningfully with NGOs and the European Parliament on decisions on the future of the EU4Health programme, respecting the provisions of the EU4Health regulation.



