EU4health
Civil Society Alliance

Dear Prime Minister de Croo,

Dear Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health Vandenbroucke,

We are writing to express our major concerns over the midterm review of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) that we understand is to be finalised at the next meeting of the European Council under your Presidency. We find it shocking that the draft re-allocations so disproportionately cut from the essential public health programme EU4Health.

A one billion cut to EU4Health would not only translate to a 20% cut of the overall EU health budget under the current MFF, but it would subvert the priorities and strategic programming of health financing left for the remaining years of the Framework. If this retrograde step is to take place, it would undermine the stated priorities for the Belgian EU presidency:

> *"Under the Belgian Presidency, health will revolve around three overarching themes: preparedness, care, and protection. The Presidency will emphasise the importance of strengthening the EU's resilience to future health threats by reinforcing crisis management, supporting healthcare systems, and improving the security of medicines supply. This way, the Belgian Presidency will put forward priorities for the next legislative term of the European Union."*

The recent crises that the EU has faced – including the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the ongoing response to the war in Ukraine and the associated health needs of refugees and EU citizens alike - have taught us that the redeployment of a large amount of funds within the MFF to respond to current priorities *must not* undermine the efforts to build and maintain EU public health capacity.

The pandemic brought into focus the essential nature of health to the functioning of our society. These events have demonstrated that sound public health is achieved through more than the basic function of healthcare systems under national jurisdiction. Rather, it is a shared competence with shared needs and challenges that span across the continent. This is why the priorities of preparedness, care, and protection are so vital. The fact that there is no obvious immediate, health threat on the scale and acute nature of the COVID-19 pandemic must not allow us to neglect this fundamental public health lesson: to be effective and robust, healthcare systems must be strategically planned and sustainably resourced; they cannot simply rely on political reactions in crisis situations.

This was foreseen by the increased finance for EU4Health within the current MFF, recognising civil society organisations' essential expertise to bridge the gap between institutions and patients and to facilitate communication at national and European level. Despite this, the EU4Health programme now faces deep cuts to its finances, disproportionate to other redeployments foreseen across the MFF. That the lesson of the need to build up EU public health is being jettisoned so soon after it was so painfully learnt is difficult to comprehend and extremely disappointing.

We hope that you share these concerns and that you too are committed to retaining public health as a priority in view of the many challenges our healthcare systems are facing. EU citizens need a strong signal that public health remains a priority for the EU.

As such, we, the EU4Health Civil Society Alliance, hope that we can count on your strong voice and leadership for the health of EU citizens by **preserving the budget of the EU4Health programme**. We stand ready to support Belgium and other EU Member States willing to deliver on this critical mission.

Signatories:

- European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
- European Patients' Forum (EPF)
- Alzheimer Europe
- EURORDIS - Rare Diseases Europe
- Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)
- Association of European Coeliac Societies (AOECS)
- Digestive Cancers Europe
- EUROCAM
- EuroHealthNet
- European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG)
- Eurocare
- European Central Council of Homeopaths (ECCH)
- European Cancer Organisation (ECO)
- European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA)
- European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Association (EFA)
- European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA)
- European Health Management Association (EHMA)
- European Heart Network (EHN)
- European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA)
- European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA)
- European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)
- European Public Health Association (EUPHA)
- European Respiratory Society (ERS)
- Health Action International (HAI)
- International Diabetes Federation Europe (IDF-Europe)
- International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA)
- International Federation of Anthroposophical Medical Associations (IVAA)
- Mental Health Europe (MHE)
- Psychedelic Access and Research European Alliance (PAREA)
- Smoke Free Partnership
- TB Europe Coalition (TBEC)
- Wemos
- All Policies for a Healthy Europe

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