



# FROM HEALTH SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY TO PROMOTING INCLUSIVE GROWTH

CONFERENCE REPORT

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## INTRODUCTION



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The Lithuanian Health Forum Conference held in Vilnius on 5 September, 2015, was organised to consolidate and address the policies, goals, and objectives of the [Vilnius Declaration's "Sustainable Health Systems for Inclusive Growth"](#), which was developed and circulated internationally during the 2013 European Council Presidency. Those objectives included:

- To increase investment in health promotion and disease prevention;
- To ensure universal access to high quality people-centred health services;
- To ensure that health system reforms including workforce planning are evidence-based and focus on cost-effectiveness, sustainability and good governance;

The Vilnius Declaration enhances and supports the United Nations' Sustainable Development goals, the World Health Organisation's (WHO)'s Health 2020 European regional document, and national policies such as Lithuania's health strategy for 2014-2025.

Hosted by the Lithuanian Parliament, the conference on the 5th of September addressed the challenges of implementing the objectives of the Vilnius Declaration, and featured the participation of international healthcare

experts from the European Union. Speakers included European Commissioner Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis, WHO Director of Health Systems and Public Health Dr. Hans Kluge, European Social Observatory Representative Rita Baeten, European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) Director of Healthcare Systems Thomas Allvin, and other thought leaders who contributed to the session.

Commissioner Andriukaitis, who is responsible for Europe's health and food safety, emphasised that only the coordinated efforts of the various state institutions would allow for the improvement of public health. The Commissioner further highlighted the importance of prevention as a key to delivering efficient public health solutions.

"Coordination, cooperation, and alignment will allow us to reduce the negative factors impacting public health. This, however, will require the willingness of politicians to implement measures that will significantly reduce the effects of alcohol and tobacco use. Until we have the political will take these important steps, we cannot hope for a more rapid improvement in public health," said the Commissioner.



*the WHO's Director of Health Systems and Public Health, Dr. Hans Kluge, participated in the conference*



*European Social Observatory Representative Rita Baeten was one of the guests at the Health Forum Conference*

## HEALTH AS AN ECONOMIC DRIVER

The health sector's strategic role as one of Europe's leading sources of jobs and economic growth was discussed in depth. Given the significance of the sector both for public health and economic development, there is increasing emphasis being placed on ensuring that a holistic view is taken to reflect the needs of all key stakeholders in the healthcare community at large. Conference participants evaluated the progress that had been made during the past three years towards integrating health outcomes management with economic development.

Many speakers noted how the sustainability of health systems is becoming an integral part of the cultural lexicon. For example, The Vilnius Declaration was cited as a primary driver of the public health strategy of Latvia's 2015 Presidency of the European Council, when *The Riga Roadmap: Investing in Health and Wellbeing for All* was adopted.



In addition, the primary themes from the Vilnius declaration were acknowledged and incorporated into the strategy of key international organisations. The WHO's regional committee included these topics in their strategic document adopted in 2015, *Priorities for strengthening health systems in the WHO European Region 2015-2020*.

"The Vilnius Declaration was proof of the results we can achieve when we involve various health sector participants in a common goal," said the WHO's Dr. Hans Kluge at the conference. It was also noted that there is continuing progress in the mutual cooperation between health system participants towards the effective implementation of the declaration's principles.

## EVIDENCE-BASED INVESTMENTS IN HEALTH PROMOTION

The health sector's role as one of the EU's largest providers of highly skilled jobs was also discussed at the conference. It was noted that the median education level of health workers is higher than that in other economic sectors and healthcare requires the application of new technologies, which encourage research and innovation.

The conference's participants considered it vital to acknowledge the value of health to insure the future of European economic competitiveness. Disease prevention through immunisation, early diagnosis, and the application of timely treatments are productive over the long-term. By making these strategic investments, it will be possible to provide more effective treatments and high-quality health care services, which also ensure the long-term productivity of a given country's labour force and economy.

Conference participants challenged the governments of European member states and the European Commission to take immediate action to increase their investments in health improvement and disease prevention, providing universal access to high-quality people-oriented health services. This would promote evidence based health system reforms including improvements in training, which would drive cost effectiveness, sustainability, and best practices in management.

During her presentation at the conference, Dr. Katrín Fjeldsted, Immediate Past-President of The Standing Committee of European Doctors, said: "Policies must be consistent. Let us remember that investments in disease prevention don't just have economic benefits. The most important thing is the patient's quality of life. Therefore, the goal of any health system reform must be the improvement of care for every patient. Economic and other political objectives are secondary."



*Dr. Katrín Fjeldsted, Immediate Past-President of The Standing Committee of European Doctors: "Investments in disease prevention don't just have economic benefits. The most important thing is the patient's quality of life"*

## CHALLENGES IN REDUCING INEQUALITY

Health improvement is a priority throughout Europe, as the world strives to reduce infectious disease, infection, and mortality rates. However, public health can also be impacted through safe roads, and reducing alcohol and tobacco consumption.

At the conference it was noted that the economic recession did impact investments in disease prevention across the OECD countries, but important results were still achieved through the reduction of smoking and the encouraging of active lifestyles. Whilst this is a positive outcome, it was noted that there are still glaring inconsistencies in health outcomes between regions and countries.

A key challenge for Europe is the need to develop best practices in health improvement and disease prevention. This is made difficult by targeted advertising from the tobacco and alcohol industries, which often overwhelms the messaging from public health organisations that try to influence healthy lifestyle choices. A large sustained improvement in public health will require a coordinated effort at the national, regional and global level.

The conference also emphasised that, in many EU member states, there is a need for safe and healthy food. Best practices must be implemented to encourage governments to promote the agricultural sector not just as a profit centre, but to provide healthy, high-quality products.



The conference came to the conclusion that guaranteeing the public access to high-quality people-oriented healthcare will also improve health inequalities across the EU. However, far greater effort is required to solve health inequalities for the socially vulnerable and minority communities. The participants also agreed that greater solidarity is needed throughout Europe to reduce the financial obstacles to acquiring new medical technologies.



## HEALTH SECTOR FINANCING – INVESTMENTS, NOT EXPENSES



At the conference it was noted that, despite the fact that health represents a significant and constantly growing portion of modern economies, the health sector is still considered to be one that consumes and not generates value for member states.

The participants of the health forum conference concluded that investments into improving the European healthcare infrastructure need to continue, and the era where we consider healthcare as only a cost have ended. There must be alignment between all healthcare stakeholders on a national and global scale to implement the required health technology developments such as the use of health data to measure outcomes.

Wise investments in healthcare innovations will ensure that the goals and objectives for health improvement

and disease prevention will be met. Visionary strategies such as the health goals included under the European Commission's Horizon 2020 or the Vilnius Declaration are effective tools to steer debate and drive needed consensus to facilitate investments in public health. The proper implementation of these strategies, including financing, monitoring, implementation, evaluation, and operational transparency, will help achieve long-term economic growth.

"The fundamentals are simple, investments into health and attempts to reduce costs in health and other sectors can help create a healthier public with sustainable systems and economies. Prevention can be profitable and create value in both the short and long-term," said Dr. Hans Kluge.



Board Chairman of the Health Forum Prof. Habil. Dr. Vilnius Grabauskas

