



EUROPEAN HEALTH SUMMIT 2021 TAKEAWAYS

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The 2nd edition of the European Health Summit took place in a virtual format on the 9th of December 2021 where prominent speakers were able to connect from Africa, North America and across Europe.

This year's edition, titled "Future preparedness. Joining forces to foster Europe's Health Resilience", was structured around 4 main themes: Global health and future preparedness, Digital Healthcare, Innovation and life sciences.

The pandemic has shown that European countries have no other choice than to embrace their cooperation if they want to overcome the ongoing crisis. Future preparedness lies at the heart of this renewed cooperation, which needs to be accomplished in a synergetic and cross border - continental manner. This will enable Europe to recognize major global health shifts and crisis management, which will undoubtedly position the EU as an international healthcare leader.

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Pandemic Preparedness

In dealing with the pandemic, the here and now should be taken into account, but also the opportunities it provides for the future. Nations must not drop their guard because they survived covid; they must continue to commit to global pandemic preparedness. In that regard, early and global collaboration is critical, and the institutionalization of the pandemic response would be very helpful. At the European level, the EU needs to work on its capacity to anticipate market needs, to scale up production, and to establish a regulatory framework for the joint procurement of vaccines. Finally, it is important to remember that the "infodemic" is also part of the problem.

Harnessing and Enabling Emerging Technologies for a Resilient Healthcare Model

An important topic that was examined at the summit was how new technologies and digitalization have been positively used as a response to Covid-19. Undoubtedly, artificial intelligence has and is playing a pivotal role in the way we respond to health crises in general. However, it is important to remember that these arising technologies come with critical risks (i.e. privacy concerns when it comes to data protection and sharing). It has been concluded that regulations will be a critical part as there needs to be a balance between protecting the population and enabling the health industries to use existing technologies.

Digital Innovation in Global Health

Covid has created a huge digital leap forward. However, innovating during a crisis is not ideal. Some digital solutions developed in urgency may not be implemented in an interoperable, sustainable, and fair way. That's why innovation should be developed from early on. The Covid Certificate is a huge success, notably because it is interoperable, and everything is open source. The speakers also discussed the construction of the EU health data space and how data and everything that comes around it is of paramount importance. A final thought that was shared was the importance of technology and how it plays in the pharmaceutical sector, particularly in distribution.



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Unlocking the Capacities of Health Data Space

Data has a huge potential in fostering innovation, but its use must be upscaled. Nevertheless, there are still some hurdles to overcome; interoperability of data, striking a balance between data sharing and privacy protection, transparency of data treatment, trust, education and respect of human rights online. The EU should not be afraid to set standards in the field of data, and that's what it's aiming at with the EU health data space proposal. This proposal aims to increase the interoperability of data for the sake of healthcare delivery and to provide a crystal-clear framework for secondary data treatments in the context of research and development.

Joining Forces with Africa to Foster Health Security

This panel opened with a conversation on the importance of building an equal partnership between the EU and Africa. Africa's expertise should be used efficiently to build partnerships in investment with a majority of African stakeholders to enable technology transfer. However, the panel also noted that Africa will need time to build their own economic system and to develop their human capital. Thus, Europe should bridge that gap and provide for long term investments. Additionally, it is important that the EU should develop a regulatory framework to build trust and attract long term investments.

Gene Therapy – The Need For A Paradigm Shift

The conversation began with a discussion on Covid-19, and how the vaccine strategy is proof that gene therapy can make a difference in the field of rare diseases. Gene therapy is an emerging area of healthcare with huge potential, but a paradigm shift is needed. Some speakers discussed how science is evolving quickly but it is still following a traditional pharmaceutical model. There was an additional discussion on the need for cooperation between member states to make therapies available across borders. Following this was a discussion on the complexity of manufacturing and how there is work to be done to incentivise manufacturing with an existing ecosystem of clinics, education, expertise, infrastructure, and incentives for innovation.



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What Role can Gene Therapies Play in Strengthening EU Healthcare Systems?

The speakers discussed how gene therapy is important for the future of healthcare and is at the frontier in the innovation cycle and will play an important role in the future of healthcare systems. There were also discussions regarding the challenges, such as funding, preparedness of healthcare systems to include gene and cell therapies, and data privacy (a lot of patients are willing to share their data, but as long as the methods for data collection and treatment are inconsistent and interoperable, that data is useless). The speakers also focused their attention on the European Union, stating that there needs to be a common approach when it comes to spreading the knowledge of the potential of gene and cell therapies as well as gathering the necessary resources to foster them.

Belgium, the Health and Biotech Valley of Tomorrow

Belgium has a leading position in healthcare. It is a talent pool, has the infrastructure, offers an attractive fiscal framework, and has so-called sand boxes, which are safe environments for experiments with disruptive technologies and innovations. If Belgium won't speed up in the coming years, it may lose that position. It is imperative that it continues to develop its assets, enhance its coordination and interconnectivity country-wide and world-wide. Moreover, discussions with experts should continue in order to choose specific technologies to focus on, as the country certainly can't be a champion in everything.