



EUROPEAN HEALTH SUMMIT 2023 TAKEAWAYS

The following reflects the opinions of the stakeholders present at the European Health Summit 2023, and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of EBS.

The 4th Edition of the European Health Summit took place at the Egmont Palace, bringing together cross-sectorial stakeholders from the healthcare sector and distinguished speakers from the realms of industry, policymaking, patient organizations, academia, and civil society.

Under the theme of “Agenda 2024-2029: the Future of Healthcare in Europe”, the Summit delved into the current and future array of challenges and opportunities the European healthcare systems will face during the next legislative cycle of the European Union. Focusing on the three main pillars – digital health, competitiveness and innovation, and sustainable healthcare systems – our esteemed speakers covered the different aspects that need to be tackled to create a resilient European Health Union in which innovation and access are put in the core of the next EU’s political agenda.

The Summit featured 5 panel discussions, 3 interactive interviews, and 3 exclusive keynotes showcasing the perspectives of over 38 experts, highlighting the relevance of prevention, accessibility and affordability of innovative therapies and drugs, competitiveness in the European pharmaceutical industry, and the benefits of incorporating digital health in our healthcare systems, thereby paving the way to sustainable and resilient healthcare systems.

OPENING CONVERSATION:

FOSTERING COMPETITION IN EUROPE: MADE IN THE EU

In the interview, Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders underscored the critical importance of fostering competition within Europe, particularly within the healthcare sector. Expressing a heightened focus on the pharmaceutical industry, Reynders stressed the need for discussions centered around managing patient access to products and ensuring companies have the financial means to drive innovation. Emphasizing the necessity of European collaboration, he urged for projects at the European level to address market risks, potential shortages, and challenges in accessing new healthcare developments. Reynders also voiced skepticism about relying solely on market forces, advocating for robust competition to safeguard fair practices and reduce dependency on third countries.

Didier Reynders, EU Commissioner for Justice:

“Competition is needed to boost innovation. In the pharmaceutical sector there are already some incentives, and we need to take good care of all of these.”

Furthermore, he highlighted the imperative of developing a resilient supply chain within Europe, ensuring innovations, proper storage, and equitable distribution among member states. Looking ahead, Reynders outlined the priorities for the next Commission, which encompass a continued focus on health policy, support for global initiatives such as Ukraine and Middle East peace, and a commitment to overarching goals like combating climate change and ensuring prosperity, with a particular emphasis on harnessing the benefits of GDPR and AI in the healthcare sector: “In healthcare, we have to continue to work on the best possible use of GDPR, in order to protect patients’ rights but also promote innovation. For this, we will have to discuss more and more on AI”.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH LARS FRUERGAARD JØRGENSEN

In the interview with Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen, CEO of Novo Nordisk and President of EFPIA, key insights emerged regarding the pharmaceutical industry’s dynamics in Europe. Jørgensen emphasized the industry’s foundation in knowledge, underscoring its significance as a less manufacturing-intensive yet substantial contributor to the European economy. He pointed to the European Commission’s pharmaceutical legislation and highlighted the dual nature of healthcare policy, acknowledging its national roots while recognizing common aspects at the EU level.

Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen, CEO of Novo Nordisk, President of EFPIA:

“It’s important to acknowledge that our industry is a global industry and it’s built on knowledge. We must ensure that Europeans have access to innovation.”

Central to Jørgensen’s remarks was the imperative to ensure European access to innovation and medicine, compelling a comprehensive discussion on market dynamics and research incentives. Within the health sector, he advocated for building resilience, contemplating the future strength of a sector pivotal to trade and prioritizing the delicate balance between ensuring patient access and maintaining a robust industry. This interview thus outlines the different challenges and considerations within the pharmaceutical landscape, emphasizing the need for collaborative, market-focused discussions to sustain innovation and accessibility in healthcare across Europe.

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BUILDING A SOLID INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL HEALTH

During this panel discussion, the cross-sectorial experts explored the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in Europe's healthcare landscape. The conversation delved into the European Health Data Space (EHDS) as a significant achievement, acknowledging its potential while recognizing the hurdles associated with healthcare data. The need for an ample number of healthcare professionals was underscored, alongside concerns about rising administrative burdens.

Panelists emphasized the imperative of extracting maximum value from health data for all stakeholders. The discussion also touched on the broader challenges within the healthcare sector, addressing issues such as an aging population, evolving health concerns, and the role of AI in healthcare applications. The panel highlighted the delicate balance required between national and European dimensions in healthcare policies, as well as the hurdles faced by smaller companies, including high access costs and global competition. The conversation concluded with reflections on the importance of inclusivity, representative health data for research, and the transformative potential of AI, emphasizing considerations for patient involvement and workforce education. As the Council has reached an agreement in approving the text, the upcoming discussions will be key in shaping the future trajectory of healthcare policies and technologies on a European scale.

Maya Matthews, Deputy Director for Digital, EU4Health and Health Systems Modernisation at DG SANTE:

"We must empower citizens to have access to their health records.

At the same time, the health workforce needs to be empowered with digital skills.

However, there is a concern that this will add to the already huge burden of healthcare workers."

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE

The demographic shifts in Europe, emphasizing an aging population and increased mobility, were discussed by Colin Scicluna, Head of Cabinet of VP Šuica. Acknowledging challenges in the healthcare sector, Scicluna noted the sector's non-attractiveness and recruitment difficulties. He addressed the migration of individuals within and outside the EU to work in healthcare, highlighting the need to bridge gaps without depleting talent from other regions. The European Commission has introduced three initiatives to encourage talent retention: a talent harnessing initiative, a demography toolbox, and the creation of an EU Talent Pool to match skilled workers from outside the EU with potential jobs across EU Member States.

Regarding making rural areas more attractive for healthcare professionals, Scicluna outlined a long-term vision focused on providing solutions for these regions. He emphasized leveraging technology and investment to achieve balance and encouraged local governments to invest in incentives. Discussing the aging population, Scicluna stressed the importance of changing narratives, framing it as an opportunity for a longevity society: "We're starting to talk about longevity society rather than aging society → longevity means that people are productive for longer. The prospect of a longer life means that you plan for your life with a different outlook."

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The interview also addressed preventive healthcare and services to tackle mental health challenges, emphasizing the role of education and technology in addressing these issues. Scicluna concluded by highlighting the European Commission's multifaceted approach to addressing demographic and healthcare challenges in Europe.

Colin Scicluna, Head of Cabinet of Vice President Šuica, European Commission:

"Loneliness is very relevant for policymakers. There is a real link between loneliness and productivity. Therefore, we should include this topic in more debates, so that we can find long-term solutions."

KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON ENHANCED PARTNERSHIPS FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

A light was shed on WHO's approach to enhancing partnerships for global health. Dr. Silberschmidt emphasized that while WHO is widely recognized as a brand, its mandate might not be as universally understood. WHO operates as three organizations under one umbrella, functioning as a standards setter in health (alongside the EU as a key player), providing technical assistance, and ensuring emergency response preparedness.

Dr. Gaudenz Silberschmidt, Director for Health & Multilateral Partnerships, WHO:

"The EU is often the frontrunner on health regulation. The EU and the WHO need to get smarter and work together on the global standards. We must work hand in hand."

Dr. Silberschmidt stressed the need for enhanced collaboration between the EU and WHO to establish global standards. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, prompting WHO to initiate dialogues between the Director-General and civil society, as well as establishing a youth council. The keynote underscored the importance of working hand in hand and expanding collaboration to include capital market investors. He also highlighted the critical role of aligning with global standards, particularly in addressing issues such as the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) ratings of entities, including the imperative of not providing favorable ratings to tobacco companies.

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC, PRIVATE, ACADEMIA, AND TECH PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVANCE R&D FOR UNMET NEEDS

There is a crucial need for better communication about ongoing efforts and fostering public-private partnerships to streamline the R&D pathway. The establishment of innovation task forces and collaborations with academia can simplify complex systems and enhance accessibility. International collaboration emerged as a cornerstone, exemplified by the EU's openness to organizations beyond its borders, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conversation also emphasized the importance of collaboration, data sharing, and flexible purchase agreements in the realm of rare diseases research. Additionally, speakers highlighted the necessity for transparent regulatory requirements, incentives for research engagement, and translating research findings into effective policymaking. The collective focus on these principles positions the EU to address global health challenges through strengthened partnerships and research initiatives.

Adam Hacker, Director and Global Head Regulatory Affairs, CEPI:

"Supporting regulatory network development in other regions should draw on the EU's model, which provides an effective framework for harmonizing cross-border regulations while respecting national sovereignty."



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ENSURING SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS THROUGH THE “ONE HEALTH” APPROACH

The “One Health” approach, extending beyond disease management, encompasses factors such as nutrition, sustainable food practices, and environmental considerations. This interconnected strategy gains significance considering the global population that is both growing and aging, as evident from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other disease outbreaks.

Key points emphasized the need to break down silos in healthcare, prioritize comprehensive preparedness with a focus on diagnostics alongside vaccines, and recognize the interconnectedness of the human and animal worlds. The discussion also underscored the importance of integrating health considerations across policies, extending beyond disease-centric approaches. Efforts to enhance vaccination convenience, especially in an aging population, were highlighted as essential for sustaining healthcare systems.

Carlos Montañés, Executive Vice President, HIPRA:

“Though there are already different initiatives in the framework of One Health in place, there are still plenty of potential synergies between Animal and Human Health that, put together, can significantly contribute to a better global health.”

The overarching conclusion emphasized the vital role of collaboration and a holistic perspective in addressing the multifaceted challenges of healthcare. It recognized the interconnected dimensions of health, calling for integrated efforts across sectors to build resilient and sustainable healthcare systems.

Andrea Corazza, Senior Director Policy & Government Affairs Europe, Novavax:

“The role of vaccines is even more important in the face of climate change. This is already having an impact, and vaccines are crucial to manage new disease outbreaks and prevent antimicrobial resistance.”

A PHARMA STRATEGY TO FOSTER EUROPE’S COMPETITIVENESS ON THE GLOBAL SCALE?

The discussion centered on the necessity for a robust pharmaceutical strategy to enhance Europe’s global competitiveness. Emphasizing the absence of prior competitiveness dialogues, the need for fair innovation practices and the development of a European industrial strategy for health were highlighted in response to the current geopolitical landscape.

The discourse also underscored the importance of informing citizens about quality and a healthy life, recognizing challenges and inequalities. Legislation emerged as a critical factor in fostering innovation and ensuring the availability of medicines, especially in the context of upcoming elections. Addressing challenges related to equality in access to medicine, changing trends, and regional disparities within Europe were stressed. The need for patient-centric policies, an enabling environment for competitiveness, and faster regulatory approvals were highlighted, framing health as a fundamental human right that requires strategic political consideration. Global perspectives were deemed essential, with a caution against excessive focus on Europe. The conversation concluded with a call to consider measures that genuinely encourage real innovation.

Massimo Giorgio Visentin, Eastern Europe Cluster President, Pfizer:

“Now we have the opportunity to foster a pro-innovation, globally competitive healthcare environment to deliver health equity and medicines access across Europe.”

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STRATEGIC COMPETITIVENESS OF EUROPE'S PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY: A MEMBER STATES' PERSPECTIVE

Minister Kocher's keynote highlighted the strategic importance of the pharmaceutical industry in Austria, with a significant 44.5 billion euros invested in R&D in 2022. However, he raised concerns about Europe's diminishing competitiveness, prompting economic processes to shift to thriving nations like China, India, South Korea, and Brazil. The minister stressed the need for increased investments to retain Europe's standing in the global pharmaceutical landscape. Economic challenges, such as an aging population and reduced healthcare budgets, pose hurdles to pharmaceutical innovation, making the continent reliant on the global market.

The discussion extended to pharmaceutical legislation, with Minister Kocher emphasizing the necessity of a legal environment conducive to investment. He urged a comprehensive evaluation of the pharmaceutical package from an industrial policy and competitiveness perspective within the COMPET Council. Expressing reservations about linking intellectual property rights to drug access across Europe, he cautioned against potential unintended consequences that could stifle innovation. The minister advocated for a clear, predictable, and globally competitive legal framework that actively supports innovation and enhances the allure of investments in the European pharmaceutical sector.

REVITALISING EUROPE'S PHARMACEUTICAL LEGISLATION: PRIORITISING PATIENT ACCESS AND INNOVATION

The discussion on revitalizing Europe's pharmaceutical legislation centers on a commitment to enhancing patient access and fostering innovation. Strategies include making Europe more attractive for clinical trials, encouraging global regulatory cooperation, and ensuring timely drug availability worldwide. The need for swift digitization, a robust regulatory framework for future pandemics, and addressing mental health concerns emerged as critical aspects.

Haseeb Ahmad, President, Europe at Novartis:

"The EU Pharma Legislation review is a unique opportunity to evolve Europe's life-sciences ecosystem. With a thoughtful approach to the RDP, we can accelerate European R&D and improve access to innovation."

Recognizing Europe's competitiveness challenge, the industry expressed a willingness to collaborate while cautioning against potential harms from proposed legislation. The importance of health for societies and economies was underscored, emphasizing the multifaceted impact of pharmaceutical legislation. The call for realistic goals and a transformative approach to innovation, especially in treating diseases like Alzheimer's, highlighted the complexity of balancing access and innovation in pharmaceutical reform.



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CLOSING REMARKS BY GIORGOS ROSSIDES, HEAD OF CABINET OF COMMISSIONER KYRIAKIDES

The Summit was closed by a keynote address that reflected the work done by the Commission on health matters and the view for the next College. It underscored the critical significance of digital innovation, particularly accentuated by the challenges brought forth by the pandemic. A key focal point was the European Health Data Space (EHDS), presented as a potent tool designed to empower scientific advancements through comprehensive data utilization, potentially unlocking transformative capabilities for the development of new medicines. Rossides stressed that the imperative extends beyond crisis response, emphasizing the need to strategically build back a healthcare system that is not only resilient but also enhanced.

Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides, European Commission:

“The pandemic underscored the importance of digital innovation. By putting the power of the data in the hand of science, the EHDS can unleash transformative power for new medicine.”

Furthermore, the address articulated a vision of the Health Union as one of the most substantial legacies to be bequeathed to the next commission. This commitment signifies a forward-looking approach, wherein collaborative efforts are geared towards advancing and unifying health initiatives. Finally, he pointed out that “the European Health Union will be the one of the most significant legacies that we will hand over to the next European Commission.”