

OPEN LETTER

To: European Commission Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides

CC:

European Parliament President David Sassoli

European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (SANTE) – Director General Ms Sandra Gallina

European Health and Digital Executive Agency – Interim Director Mr Matthew Hudson

European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (SANTE) – Head of EU4Health Task Force Mr Adrian Peres

2 June 2021

RE: Open Letter from Members of the European Parliament and NGOs to the EU Commission - The importance of operating grants for civil society organisations in the field of health

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

The EU4Health programme, which entered into force on 26 March 2021, represents a welcome and unique opportunity to build stronger, better resourced, and more resilient health systems. The Programme will address many crucial issues that will lead to a stronger EU action in the field of health and represents a key pillar towards a true European Health Union bringing real added value for all Europeans.

However, as we await the release of the first Work Programme, we are deeply concerned about a clear gap in terms of concrete support to civil society organisations through operating grants.

Health civil society organisations play a crucial role at many levels. They are a vital partner to both European and National institutions to shape and implement public health strategies and policies.

Civil society organisations are essential in bridging the gap between policymaking and the communities they represent in a professional, efficient, and democratic manner. This was made even more apparent during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Civil society organisations were able to rapidly adapt to the situation, dedicating expertise, and capacity to help policymakers in developing and communicating their pandemic response strategies to the public, while feeding back essential information for better decisions based on people's diverse needs and concerns.

It is only through their core operational activities that civil society organisations can carry out this fundamental work and operating grants in the past have consistently demonstrated their significant added value.

To our knowledge, the 2021 Work Programme will not foresee a specific budget allocation to operating grants for CSOs. As the current operating grants framework will come to an end this year, this would create a major gap that would strongly hinder the sustainability of many civil society organisations, hampering their capacity to deliver in a timely and independent way on their essential role as partners in EU health policymaking. We are concerned to see the European Commission taking this step backwards only in the area of health, in the middle of a health crisis.

We therefore urgently call the European Commission to **revise its position on operating grants in the field of health**, starting with the 2021 EU4Health Work Programme and moving towards a **stronger commitment in years to come, building on the larger budget available, the current Regulation and a workable, accountable approach to effective use of resources**. As similar mechanisms are still active for European organisations active in other fields, such as social policies (e.g., disability and non-discrimination) or environment, it is essential that the EU does not forget health.

As highlighted by the European Parliament in its work on the EU4Health proposal, with an EU that is looking at developing an even stronger collaboration and action in the field of health, from EU4Health to the European Health Union and the Conference on the Future of Europe, **health civil society organisations must be recognised and supported** as an integral part of EU health policy development and implementation.

Sincerely,

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Civil Society Organisations

