



[Press Release] A Call for Action - The Vilnius Declaration

Sustainable Health Systems for Inclusive Growth in Europe. Lithuanian Presidency conference issues urgent call for action for immediate moves to protect Europe's healthcare systems

Vilnius (Lithuania) 21 November 2013 – Austerity cuts have put Europe's healthcare systems under severe pressure, increasing health inequalities and threatening sustainability in the future.

Now, European governments and the European Union need to take immediate action to prevent further damage. **The Vilnius Declaration**, agreed at a high level health event of the Lithuanian Presidency, **sets out three broad action points** to be presented to the Council of Health Ministers to inform their debate when they meet in December.

The aim is **to ensure European health systems are people-centred, sustainable and inclusive – and that they deliver good health for all**. To achieve this it is necessary to:

1. Increase investment in health promotion and disease prevention
2. Ensure universal access to high-quality, people-centred health services
3. Ensure that health system reforms – including workforce planning – are evidence-based and focus on cost-effectiveness, sustainability and good governance.

The Vilnius Declaration is “a crowning document” of all the work done by the Lithuanian Presidency **to ensure healthcare systems are sustainable for the future, said Tonio Borg**, EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, responding as the Declaration was released.

“Health is considered a financial albatross around necks. It should not be,” Commissioner Borg told delegates at the conference ‘Sustainable Health Systems for Inclusive Growth in Europe’.

“Health is a value in itself, even if it didn't have positive economic consequences. But if there are positive economic consequences it's even better,” Commissioner Borg said.

“Are our health systems sustainable? The answer is yes – if they introduce reform,” said Commissioner Borg. The tools and policy framework are in place at a European level to help Member States with this. *“Let us just finish the job: the Commission is committed to doing all it can to foster higher quality healthcare, available to all, on a long-term, sustainable basis,”* Mr Borg went on to say.

The Vilnius Declaration - the distillation from a number of events and discussions on how to make healthcare systems resilient for the future that have taken place during the Lithuanian Presidency - was finalised during two days of debate and discussion at the conference in Vilnius, which was **supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), European Patient Forum (EPF) and the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA).**

“The Vilnius Declaration provides the response that will assist Commissioner Borg to deliver on the vision of sustainable healthcare – and turn the albatross into a dove,” Peggy Maguire, President of EPHA, told the closing plenary session. *“There is no economic future without health at the centre of it,”* she said.

Dr Hans Kluge, Director of the Division of Health Systems and Public Health at the WHO Regional Office for Europe, echoed this. *“The messages on sustainability have been converging and these have been synergised into a powerful Declaration, in line with the values embedded in the Health 2020 and renewals of Tallinn Charter and Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care,”* Dr Kluge said.

On his side, Anders Olauson, President of EPF said, ***“the huge health inequalities faced by patients across the EU are evermore apparent, with unacceptable consequences. The Vilnius Declaration represents a collective commitment to rethink how health systems operate, where patients play a role, through patient empowerment, in delivering high quality sustainable, equitable healthcare.”***

Speaking at an earlier session, Christopher Viehbacher, President of EFPIA and CEO of Sanofi SA said, *“the economic crisis has seen unprecedented austerity measures across Europe. We believe we have reached a limit. We should ask ourselves if we can accept a society where not all have equitable access to healthcare and innovative medicines. **We need to act now to find innovative solutions and business models. If we don’t, we risk losing the improvements in health that we have gained in the last 30 years.”***

Concluding the conference, Vytenis Povilas Andruikaitis, Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania gave his support to the Declaration. *“It is particularly important in dealing with today’s healthcare challenges in communicable and chronic diseases, and in stressing the importance of inter-sectoral and international cooperation,”* Minister Andruikaitis said.

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