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# Healthcare young heroes go out to fight new battles

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« You can't expect people who are at the end of their career to change their way of thinking. It needs young people to bring fresh ideas to health systems – and that is what you have to do now. » That is what MEP Philippe de Backer (BE; ALDE) told the members of the European Health Parliament at their final plenary session in Brussels on 16 June.

The 80 members of the European Health Parliament – young professionals from government departments, healthcare professions, academia, civil society organisations and the world of business – have been exploring healthcare themes over the last nine months in committees and in plenary session.

At their final plenary, they presented a series of recommendations on how healthcare might be improved by more radical approaches.

Last year, De Backer had called them « young heroes » for their ambition. At the closing session he said they had shown heroic qualities in developing their recommendations on paper, and now they had to go out and fight like heroes to make change happen in the real world.

Their key recommendations included :

- doing more and better with fewer resources, by taking a wider view of health that sees health spending as an investment rather than as a cost;

- creating a Europe-wide connected Electronic Health Records Organisation to collect and make use of patient data across member states;
- employing a table of criteria for decision-making on who gets what when choices have to be made on access to new therapies;
- making Europe's healthcare systems as mobile and flexible as the cross-border threats that they now face;
- integrating digital health fully into healthcare systems as part of a comprehensive strategy – including into reimbursement systems;
- embedding patient involvement at every level of the health system, from policy-making through to delivery of care;
- preventing chronic disease through reducing alcohol-related harm and counteracting Europe's tendency to heavy consumption.

Katerina Konecna (CZ; GUE/NGL) added her own recommendation on the economic aspects : to promote greater common EU funding for healthcare in a spirit of solidarity. Margrete Auken (DK; Greens/EFA) urged the members to focus on reducing runaway drug prices and ensuring that drug firms' promotion was transparent and their relations with authorities were devoid of conflicts of interest. Karin Kadenbach (AU; S&D), speaking on patient empowerment, emphasised the need for effective health literacy. And Charles Goerens (LU; ALDE) pointed out how the Ebola crisis had revealed systemic weaknesses in approaches to healthcare, in Europe and at international level, as well as in the countries in West Africa that had suffered most from the current outbreak. Cristian Busoi (RO; EPP) added that better coordination among member states was essential to tackle the growing threats of cross-border transmission of infections.

Victor Negrescu (RO; S&D) championed the idea of giving health new status within EU policy, and congratulated the European Health Parliament on setting out some of the steps that could lead in that direction. Eva Kaili (GR; S&D) highlighted the importance of maintaining momentum in the development of digital health, so that the EU could fully benefit from the capacity of new technologies to fight disease and maintain health.

In his remarks on coping with chronic disease, Giovanni La Via (IT; EPP), who is also chair of the European Parliament's

committee on health, argued for a clear EU strategy on alcohol. And speaking more generally on health policy, he called for the EU to overcome the limitations that the Treaty sets in allocating responsibility for health mainly to national authorities. « We should work together and get better results by cooperation among member states, » he said. « The strong support of young people » could make a real contribution that goal, he concluded.

Philippe de Backer said it was vital to take a broad political approach to health and to issues of access, giving greater priority than at present to prevention in the overall policy mix. He congratulated the members of the European Health Parliament on what they had done over the preceding months – but, he added, « there is still work to do ».

The President of the European Health Parliament, Magdalena Kalata from Poland, said: “Although health remains a competence for national governments, people are moving within the EU more than ever before. So member states’ politicians should recognise the need for more EU involvement, more resourcing and more coordination, to guarantee access to quality healthcare to all EU citizens, whichever member state they happen to be in.”

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