



**FutureProofing  
Healthcare »**

# **FutureProofing Healthcare for all European Citizens:**

A vision for building the EU's  
role in healthcare

## FutureProofing Healthcare for all European citizens: A vision for building the EU's role in healthcare



The FutureProofing Healthcare initiative has, since its inception, asked the question: what can we learn from the health systems of today to shape the health systems of the future? By considering what works from across Europe, we can build an ambitious and optimistic vision for how policies can facilitate rapidly changing healthcare while leaving no one behind.

In response to the pandemic, European citizens have increasingly realised that health is a shared European concern, and expect the EU to rise to emerging challenges and facilitate advancement by delivering health policy solutions. Contrary to the popular impression that Europe was slow to act in the beginning of the pandemic compared to countries operating independently, there are success stories that demonstrate Europe's capacity to react and quickly implement robust health policy solutions under pressure. For instance, Europe developed and implemented the first and largest interoperable system for digital certification of vaccine status (the so-called Green Pass), as well as two technical and legal standards for digital contact tracing (DP-3T and PEPP-PT) that became global standards already in early Spring 2020. However, the EU's current institutional limitations in healthcare could lead to an expectation-capability gap in the long-term, as citizens will expect the EU to continue delivering health policy solutions.

The Conference on the Future of Europe presents the EU with a unique opportunity to anticipate our healthcare future and define bold objectives for the EU's future role in delivering healthcare policy. In this context, the FutureProofing Healthcare expert panel in Europe convened to discuss how we as experts in healthcare and health policy would envision the European healthcare system of the future, and what would enable that future vision to come to pass. This paper presents the conclusions of these discussions.

## What should European healthcare look like in 30 years?

To make the most of the opportunity ahead of us, it is helpful to establish an ambitious end-goal. This will allow us to collaborate in building the future we envision, challenging ourselves to find policy solutions which are bold and meaningful. This goal is described here in three 'vision statements' about the ideal European healthcare system of the future.

*European health systems will move to spending more of their budget on public health and prevention, avoiding system breakdown and improving overall population health.*

Over the next decades, European healthcare systems will be put under increasing strain from the pressure of ageing populations and growth of non-communicable diseases. Against these challenges, the healthcare system of the future will need to increasingly invest in public health and prevention in order to contain overall expenditure and advance healthy life years for all Europeans. This will not only require a shift of healthcare resources but also a systematic approach to improve our understanding of which citizens are at risk of becoming sick and how we can ensure that they remain as well as possible for as long as possible.

*Better informed and digitally literate Europeans will be more empowered to take charge of their own health by managing how their data is collected, used, and exchanged.*

European citizens are increasingly taking a leading role in the management of their own health. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, citizens are becoming familiar with carrying an electronic health record with them in the form of a digital health data wallet. This is setting a precedent in which seamless access to health data and digital services becomes the norm for future health data exchanges.

There is a clear risk that as citizens have increased access to both accurate and inaccurate information, the health information gap will widen between those who are digitally literate and those who are not. For citizens to be better informed it will be necessary to have a system in place to decrease the amplification of disinformation in the public sphere.

*Increased technology integration will relieve burdens on health systems and healthcare workers.*

Increased technological capacities in healthcare will relieve many of the daily tasks of healthcare professionals, while also necessitating increasing ICT specialisation in order to master many of the emerging technological advancements. Within healthcare systems, increased technology usage and the alleviation of mundane daily tasks by healthcare professionals can reduce the cost burden on health systems and unlock resources that can be re-allocated to provide improved care for patients.

While the increased use of technology will allow for the reallocation of resources, it will be necessary for policy-makers to be proactive in addressing the impact of these changes to healthcare systems and their effect on how healthcare is delivered.

## What will make this vision happen?

Each of these visions requires a significant shift, both with regards to deploying and accelerating the uptake of new technologies at the intersection between health and digital, as well as having clear policy frameworks in place to maximize the use of such technologies. Policy is an important enabler, making the difference between technical advancement and fundamental shifts to how healthcare is experienced by citizens. We are already observing the emergence of several innovative technologies, which combined in an ecosystem, can support the European health systems of the future, for instance:

- Telemedicine will allow healthcare practitioners to manage increased capacity needs, while complementing interactions with patients. This provides a compelling alternative for monitoring complex, chronic diseases like diabetes or cardiovascular disease. Telemedicine is also expected to enable remote consultation and patient education while allowing for more accessible, cost-effective care and increased patient engagement. These factors combine to make it a promising tool for early intervention and prevention, reducing the need for sick care.
- Artificial intelligence (AI) will augment the work of healthcare professionals and offer support in various fields of healthcare, such as by creating efficient processes for remote medical imaging and analysis, computer-aided detection systems for diagnosis and efficient and targeted drug discovery. Delivery of healthcare will be transformed when different innovation platforms, like artificial intelligence, robotics, genomics, and blockchain technology are evolving and converging.
- The Internet of Medical Things will connect medical devices and collect valuable data that enables healthcare providers to make informed decisions and offer evidence-based treatment. Moreover, wearables and implantables will enable real-time monitoring of people's health status which will also increase patient engagement and allow more personalised and efficient treatment. We will also increasingly see "invisibles" within the built environment, like sensors integrated into houses or indirect measurement through water or electricity consumption, which can generate new types of health and wellbeing data.
- Lastly, as technology will allow simulation of healthcare infrastructure through augmented reality and digital representation through creation of a 'digital twin', patients and healthcare systems will have more possibilities for experimenting and comparing the impact of change.

All of these innovations can lead to variety of benefits including reduced cost burden on systems, improved efficiencies, improved patient health management, and can contribute to the development of new treatments. A key question remains how societies can best capitalise on these technologies in order to maximise the health of European citizens and realise the promise of a futureproof health system. This is where policies can either enable or hinder the use of emerging technologies to shape the future of health for Europeans. The EU's role in facilitating this future needs to be guided by a coherent vision of the expected impact of these technologies. This coherent vision must thereafter translate into more specific guidance on technologies such as medical AI and digital health devices, with the requirements for use being proportionate to risk, instead of taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

One way forward with how the EU could support with this would be to set minimum standards for healthcare services as [called for by the S&D Group](#), ranging from access to basic services, critical care capacities or hospital beds per capita. By setting common standards modelled by high

performing countries, the EU could, in combination with supplementary policy instruments for funding support, foster a 'race to the top' in healthcare delivery. This approach has been successful in other sectors such as in environmental policy, where the EU has consistently adopted standards based on high-performing EU Member States.

Another way forward in order to achieve these visions would be to establish clear legal frameworks and interoperability standards. The EU can lead the world by demonstrating how international health data standards can facilitate faster innovation and also help European countries to understand and assess their health systems' performance. Governments should establish incentives for data sharing as part of public sector performance management. At the moment, very few countries have embedded incentives for making data accessible in the performance audits of public bodies, despite there being demonstrable benefits of fostering secure data exchange.

The creation of a network of European Public Health Institutes that issues common guidance to national governments can also facilitate the realisation of the outlined visions. Such a network, with specialised centres of excellence across a range of Member States, would provide leadership in promoting health research and issue guidance based on the latest scientific evidence. The leadership of these centres could also provide counsel to European institutions and national governments. While such guidance would not be binding, funding instruments to national governments could be conditional on compliance with issued guidelines, which would incentivize adoption across the EU.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission has taken steps towards building a European Health Union, including reinforcing the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). This mandate should be further extended to include the collection of epidemiological data on non-communicable diseases, [as suggested by Anne Bucher](#). This will allow the ECDC to utilize the latest technologies to collect more data and provide greater access for national governments. A regional model for epidemiological data collection does not need to come at the expense of health monitoring at a national level, and can instead complement national capacities, particularly for smaller Member States.

As part of the discussions that have taken place under the [plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#), there are already some clear indications that European citizens do support a minimum standard approach to healthcare, with for instance a recommendation on standards in dental health across Europe. The importance of health as a key area where citizens expect the EU to deliver is also supported by the [Eurobarometer survey](#) recorded during the COVID pandemic, where 38% of European citizens mentioned health as the most important issue currently facing them, even more important than their economic situation and climate change.

## Realising our vision for the whole EU

Although we have observed a greater ambition on behalf of the EU in healthcare with the adoption of a 'European Health Union' package in November 2020, it is not clear if this is sufficient to overcome the aforementioned expectation-capability gap, as the Health Union effort is mainly intended to address cross-border healthcare threats, and not to foster greater convergence by improving performance and decreasing disparities between healthcare systems as such.

A logical consequence following a call to increase convergence between European healthcare system would then be to discuss whether an upgraded EU mandate in healthcare to a shared competence is necessary to meet this public expectation, instead having a role confined to that of coordinator as per the current institutional framework.

In the long run, it remains to be seen from the upcoming discussions whether there is sufficient political appetite to grant the EU explicit competences in health policy, or whether it would be better to use the existing EU powers more efficiently while retaining the existing competence structure. However, we do believe that health will continue to dominate the European political agenda even when the pandemic is over and therefore would encourage policy makers to take steps to allow the vision shared here to take shape, for the benefit of all Europeans citizens. Nevertheless, healthcare is still the responsibility of member states so EU should encourage and support developments at the national and regional level, as well.

## About FutureProofing Healthcare

[FutureProofing Healthcare](#) is an initiative that aims to accelerate and support the future evolution of healthcare by tracking and measuring progress towards more sustainable, personalised, integrated, and digital health systems. The Indices aggregate accredited, current third-party data to enable us to take stock, learn from best practices and most importantly, start a conversation to shape sustainable healthcare systems for the future.

The content of the vision paper came out of discussions with the FutureProofing Healthcare's European Expert Panel Members and their direct contributions.