

## PES Presidency Declaration

### Affordable and quality healthcare for all

*Adopted by the PES Presidency on 25 June 2020*

Europe is recognised throughout the world for its strong social protection, advanced healthcare and its skilled and dedicated health and care professionals. It is thanks to these solid foundations that our Member States managed to limit the adverse effects of a health crisis of this magnitude. Nevertheless, the COVID pandemic has exposed the negative consequences of austerity policies in the area of health but also the deficiencies and limitations of public health and care systems (especially for the elderly) across our Member States.

Our political family has always underlined that good health is central to people's wellbeing - we fought to establish strong and efficient national and regional health systems. The COVID crisis has only reinforced this position. We must continue to be bold and vocal in fighting for our ideals, in striving to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and wellbeing and in delivering progressive answers to citizens' health concerns. This is how we build a social Europe for everyone.

Guaranteeing universal access to affordable and quality healthcare to all citizens - regardless of their socio-economic background or geographical handicaps of their place of residence - and at all stages of life is an absolute a priority for our movement. This is a fundamental right and a key determinant of economic, social and territorial cohesion. Barriers to access and inequalities persist today and must be addressed urgently. Universality and affordability will only be assured through strong and well-funded public health and care institutions, which invest in training, the wellbeing and working conditions of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. These services, and the people who provide them, are the backbone of our welfare states and they must be strengthened. Public hospitals have to be accessible and in the proximity of every citizen, enabling them to deliver effective health and care services.

We must also ensure that high quality treatment medicines, vaccines and treatments, including for rare diseases, are available, affordable, sustainable and equally accessible to everyone. To this end, investment in research and development of new drugs and vaccines, as well as sex and age-disaggregated data collection is key. A genuine European Research Area, with the pooling of material and human resources can only benefit this cause. To truly address many health challenges we need to look at the root causes and shift our focus towards the improvement of quality of food, water, and natural and living environment, the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and the prevention of illness. Ultimately, investment in healthcare and health promotion will both reduce the burden on national economies and increase citizens' quality of life. More must be done to prevent accidents,



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work-related injury, and physical and psychological illnesses. The fundamental sexual and reproductive health and rights of everyone, especially women, LGBTI people in all their diversity and other vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers and refugees in EU Member States, must also be protected and strengthened.

COVID-19 has highlighted some serious shortcomings. They have shown the need for strengthening and modernising our national healthcare systems, investing in our professional health and care workers and infrastructures and that better health policy coordination at EU level is highly necessary. Strengthening EU's competences and policies in the area of health, in full respect of national and regional competence and the principle of subsidiary, needs to be addressed at the Conference on the Future of Europe. The European Union must also be seen as a Health Union with better instruments and cooperation mechanisms, supporting national and regional healthcare systems, building a common resilience against future health crises, through strong tools, information sharing, management at an early stage and measures. A first decisive step in this direction would be the EU harmonisation of health-related statistics. Moreover, in the face of the severe difficulties encountered by Member States as a result of the pandemic, it is clear that the activation of the EU solidarity clause in relation to cross-border health emergencies can greatly benefit European citizens.

The PES Presidency welcomes the work of the PES Social Europe Network on the document: *Affordable quality healthcare for all*. This document forms the basis of our approach to healthcare and to improve the wellbeing of all citizens.