

MEP Interest Group on Equitable Access to Healthcare



Brief Background

Many patients in Europe have no or limited access to proper and timely diagnosis and treatment. The MEPs Interest Group on Equitable Access to Healthcare is committed to playing a major role in providing a platform for discussion and concrete action, in cooperation with patients and the healthcare community. It also promotes synergies and knowledge-sharing regarding disease specific initiatives in the EP relating to access, and other thematic interest groups to ensure maximum effectiveness.

The main objectives of the MEP Interest Group on Equitable Access are, but not limited to:

- To bridge healthcare stakeholders and EU policy-making,
- To actively work with the European Commission and the Council to identify the possible EU policy measures aimed at improving access
- To work with the Council to make sure that EU policy measures are tailor-made to respect specific national problems and that Member States respond positively to EU-suggested initiatives
- The supporting MEPs will promote in their Member States the opportunities created by the EU for healthcare-related projects at Member States' level

The success of the Interest Group and PACT's joint work, from 2014 to 2020 can be outlined as:

- ✓ Bringing together for the first time, on an equal footing, public health associations, healthcare professionals associations, industry associations in a patient led and focused partnership for a common goal and establishing PACT as a 'go to' organization on equitable access for the EU institutions.
- ✓ It ensured that patient access to equitable and high-quality healthcare is high on the political agenda, by working jointly with the other EU institutions.
- ✓ A high-level conference took place in July 2019 on the future of Health in the EU, advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which resulted in the Health PACT Consensus Document, the culmination of much collaborative work, shared purpose, and common vision.

The new mandate

On June 25th, Members of the European Parliament together with the Patient Access Partnership (PACT) officially relaunched the Interest Group on Equitable Access to Healthcare. The two-hour online event entitled *“More Health in Europe or More Europe in Health?”* outlined the main objectives of the Group and reflected on the renewed strategy of the Patient Access Partnership for the new mandate of the European institutions. The COVID-19 crisis has glaringly revealed and showed us the importance of ensuring equitable access, the link between health and economy and how the gaps in our health systems leave us all vulnerable.

Building on the successes and achievements of the last 5 years, most notably the efforts on measuring the gaps and inequities in patient access across Europe, the Group will continue to play a major role in providing a platform for discussion and concrete action, in cooperation with patients and the healthcare community. In addition to ensuring that access remains high on the political agenda, the Group will strive to be a real campaign engine and change agent for equitable access, as a fundamental human right.

In the new mandate the group will be co-chaired by MEP Andrey Kovatchev, MEP Kateřina Konečná, MEP Petra De Sutter, MEP Sara Cerdas, MEP Tiemo Woelken, and MEP Tomislav Sokol.

One of the main messages of PACT and the partners was that, throughout the last years much efforts on measuring the gaps and inequities in patient access across Europe have been made. This is why the ambition of the renewed approach of PACT over the next 5 years is to move to solution and learning mode, by concentrating on selected evidence-based, workable solutions that can be showcased, replicated and scaled throughout Europe and in different disease areas. *“We have much to build on. Yet there remains so much to do – because of, yet beyond the Pandemic”* shared in her inaugural speech, the Chairperson of the Partnership, Ms. Susanna Palkonen.

Head of Division for Health Policy, Public Health, Health Care Systems, and Health Care Provision of the Permanent Representation of Germany to the European Union in Brussels - Mr. Ortwin Schulte, presented the main priorities of the German Presidency and the planned access-related activities under it. In the context of the current crisis, Mr. Schulte stated: *“COVID-19 reshapes the agenda”*. Prioritized areas in healthcare, among others, were identified by Mr. Ortwin Schulte as: digitalization, availability, accessibility, affordability.

The Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) was represented on the event by Mr. Wolfgang Buecherl (Acting Head of Unit) and Ms. Katarzyna Ptak-Bufkens (Policy Officer), who stressed upon the importance of investment for sustainability in health systems and presented the latest health-related recommendations in the framework of the European Semester.

A multi-stakeholder debate took place during the event, dedicated on *“How will COVID-19 impact the role of the EU in European health policy?”*. The panelists, who took part in the debate,

represented a wide-ranging variety of stakeholders, including public health associations, healthcare professionals' associations, MEPs, EU institutions' representatives and industry associations. Nevertheless, they all united around and agreed upon an enhanced role and better collaboration of the EU in health or namely: More Health in Europe **and** More Europe in Health.

At the closing of the MEP Relaunch event Dr. Stanimir Hasardzhiev, Secretary-General of PACT, reminded and pointed out the importance of "**The Health PACT**". The document places Access, as a multidimensional problem, which cannot be solely tackled, but rather through strengthening cross-border, cross-sectoral collaboration, in order to address access barriers within and across Member States. Dr. Hasardzhiev concluded by calling for: "*Lets this be one of the last events within our 'medical' community and give a start to the multisectoral events and collaboration*".

The official report from the event can be found [here](#)!