



EFN Policy Statement on HERA Future Impact on Preparedness

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that health emergencies do not stop at borders and require a coordinated response across a breadth of fields. Considering the urgency inherent to public health emergencies, a rapid and comprehensive response is key in which civil society stakeholders, representing patients, consumers, and healthcare professionals from across the EU, play a central role to be better prepared for future health crises.

An important part of the EU-level coordination on preparedness and response towards cross-border threats to health has been allocated to a new European Commission service, the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), established during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is key HERA mandate (COM Decision C (2021) 6712) continues strengthening the EU's capacity to address health threats. However, more clarity is needed on collaboration between HERA and member states in times of crisis and on HERA's effective ability to coordinate EU actions in the face of potential unilateral national measures. In the preparedness phase, it is important to leverage synergies between HERA and member states' activities and avoid duplication.

Furthermore, health emergency preparedness and response must include activities to prevent health emergencies from occurring where possible. To this end, the role of HERA in developing standardised tools to monitor health threats and supporting early and effective remedial responses, must be considered critical to the HERA impact. In this respect, the growing healthcare professional shortages, especially doctors and nurses, received very limited attention from HERA. Doctors and nurses are the ones who will enable the most effective and rapid action to be taken, they know the population; they know their environment; they know the words for good understanding and trust building.

It is key for optimal preparedness to address this issue in the future HERA mandate as during the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals not only faced medicine and product shortages but also shortages of nurses and doctors. Mistakes from the COVID-19 pandemic should not be repeated. HERAs preparedness and response activities should include continuity

planning for the healthcare delivery system with a specific focus on safe staffing levels as this is key to the response to any health threat. This would allow for a more holistic approach to health threats that includes recommendations on human resources for health, workforce distribution, training, shortages, capacity planning, supporting national capacity building for emergency preparedness, resource planning and above all protecting the most vulnerable.

HERA's competencies, tasks, resources and overall mandate should thus be further defined and specified. Therefore, the EFN calls on the European Institutions and Member States to:

- Strengthen HERA's mandate in 2024 by further developing the existing capacities on three aspects to ensure a high level of preparedness and resilience for future crises:
 - Closer coordination and consolidation of existing actors on the EU and national levels into an integrated and responsive health security architecture;
 - Stronger and more flexible funding for preparedness and response measures to build and improve an effective set of tools for responding to emerging health threats;
 - A more comprehensive view of health preparedness and response, including access, availability, and deployment of medical countermeasures in health systems as well as support for frontline healthcare professionals.
- Develop optimal and diverse ways to deliver public health countermeasures within healthcare systems by distributing not only medical countermeasures but also human resources and frontline staff, to minimise the impact on routine healthcare services. HERA should therefore support for workforce planning, distribution, training and upskilling of nurses and doctors. In any health emergency, the resilience and preparedness of Europe's health workforce is vital.
- Setting a high standard of information and harmonise communications, addressing frontline healthcare professionals, by supporting the development of educational and training materials to address health threats, to ensure consistent messaging and enhance public trust. EFN proposes education and training modules on management, procurement, demand analysis and dispensing of public health countermeasures, as well as on how to communicate with patients in times of crisis. These modules should cover an integrated care system between hospital care and community care to respond better to the unmet citizen's needs, including surveillance mechanisms. Although the actions can refer to all health care professionals, EFN suggest focusing down HERA efforts on nurses and GPs to get tangible outcomes and impact, which can then be replicated to other frontline professionals.

- Add experienced frontline nurses to the European Health Security Council, and encourage member states to include nurses in the consultation for crisis preparedness, not only physicians and epidemiologists, and advise on the daily management of the health crisis and education/training needed. The coordination of care is essential, with a specific focus on a dialogue between hospital care and community care (including care at home). Nurses must be fully utilised to manage the health crisis. Therefore, it is essential for each member states to have clear view of the level of competencies to tackle the challenge.
- Development of a European strategy on preparedness for health threats, to make sure the efforts of different actors, especially the frontline healthcare professionals, are aligned, and accountability well established, including through the use of relevant targets e.g. in reduction of workforce shortage. Achieving safe staffing levels could support any preparedness strategy.

All this brings health to the core of EU decision-making and contributes towards realising the ambition to establish a European Health Union. In order to mirror the societal importance of health in the EU's political ecosystem, HERA must be further elevated politically, and health and health emergency response must continue to be a top priority for the upcoming Commission.

Further readings:

- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council,...introducing HERA, the European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority, the next step towards completing the European Health Union (COM/2021/576 final) [Doc1 - resource.html \(europa.eu\)](#) & [Doc2 - resource.html \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [EFN Report 2015 on Ebola and Infectious Diseases "We are not prepared unless we are all prepared"](#)

Please contact Dr Paul De Raeve, Secretary General of the European Federation of Nurses Associations, for more information. Email: efn@efn.eu - Tel: +32 2 512 74 19 - Web: www.efn.eu

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