

Foreword

As we emerge from the economic crisis, the squeeze on health budgets continues in many EU countries, and policy makers face the challenge of maintaining universal access to essential and high-quality care with reduced resources.

The new chapter on “Access to care” in this edition of *Health at a Glance Europe* shows that the main effort in this constrained budgetary environment has been to maintain universal coverage for a core set of health services and goods. However, the coverage of other health services and goods has been reduced in several countries and direct out-of-pocket payments by patients have increased. Policy makers are now facing challenges in ensuring affordable health care for all. Moreover, the crisis, having huge social impact, has exacerbated the unequal geographic distribution of health services and health professionals in many European countries. This calls for policies to improve access to care, particularly for people living in rural and remote areas and in deprived urban areas (for example by developing e-health tools).

The economic crisis has led to adverse population health outcomes. The number of people suffering from depression has increased in several European countries, as a result of growing unemployment, financial hardship and stress. Although broad measurements of health status such as life expectancy have continued to improve in nearly all EU member states, it will take some additional years to be able to fully assess the impact of the crisis on public health.

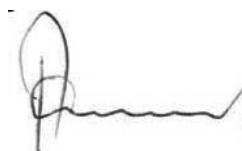
Despite the difficult financing conditions, the quality of care has continued to improve in recent years in most European countries. For example, over the past decade mortality rates for people suffering from a heart attack have decreased by 40%, and from strokes by 20%, on average across EU countries. However, large gaps remain in the probability of surviving these life-threatening conditions across the European Union. Efforts are needed to promote healthy lifestyle, protect healthy living standards and to improve the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of diseases in countries that are lagging behind. Countries across Europe need to ensure that effective strategies are put in place to prevent diseases so as to reduce the disease burden and, as such, to contribute to the sustainability of health systems.

This third edition of *Health at a Glance Europe* is the result of a long and fruitful collaboration between the OECD and the European Commission in the development and reporting of key health statistics. The European Core Health Indicators on public health and health systems presented in this publication are an important input to public debates on policies to improve public health and health system performance across Europe. This report underlines the need for reliable and sustainable data and information systems to support health policy development in Europe.

Our hope is that this publication will help stimulate further actions so that European citizens of all socio-economic background can enjoy longer, healthier and more active lives.



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