NEWS FROM BRUSSELS

European NURSING Council

Word From Senior Policy Advisor Dr. Theodoros Koutroubas

Dear Friends,

Healthcare is ever more in the heart of European policies:

- Increasingly the need to seriously discuss the role and the consequences of AI in the Health sector becomes evident.
- Digital Health technologies are a reality that needs to be regulated.
- Mental Health is key to the wellbeing of societies, including the wellbeing of their economies.

I hope these articles catch your attention.

Do come back with questions and feedback.

Kind regards,

Theo

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

New WHO/Europe Report Provides First-Ever Snapshot of AI in Health Care Across European Union Member States

Digital Health Technologies in Europe: New European Commission Report Highlights Opportunities and Challenges

Commission Announces New Global Health Commitments at One Health Summit

The Economic Case for Preventing Mental Ill Health

New World Health Organisation (WHO)/Europe Report Provides First-Ever Snapshot of AI in Health Care Across European Union Member States

WHO/Europe has released a new report on the 20th of April, assessing the rapidly evolving use of artificial intelligence (AI) in health care across the 27 European Union (EU) Member States. The first comprehensive review of its kind, the report reveals strong and consistent momentum across EU Member States, with all 27 countries recognizing improved patient care as a driver of AI development and the majority already deploying AI tools in clinical settings.

The report, produced as part of a multi-year funding agreement with the European Commission, builds on a recent WHO/Europe regional report, published in late 2025, by zooming in on the 27 EU Member States specifically.

Based on data collected between June 2024 and March 2025, the report points to a landscape in which health systems across the region are actively building the foundations needed to harness these technologies safely, equitably and responsibly.

Nearly three quarters of EU countries are already using AI-assisted diagnostics, including tools that support medical imaging, disease detection and clinical decision-making.

Nearly half of EU Member States have already created dedicated professional roles for AI and data science in health, and several countries have indicated plans to introduce or expand AI training programmes in the near future. The findings also point to clear priorities for continued investment as AI adoption accelerates across the region.

While 74% of EU countries report using AI in diagnostics and 63% use chatbots to support patient engagement, the region is now focused on ensuring workforce training keeps pace, with countries increasingly integrating AI literacy into both pre-service education and continuous professional development. This focus on skills and preparedness reflects a broader commitment across EU Member States to ensure that the rapid adoption of AI in clinical settings translates into better patient outcomes, with health professionals equipped to critically engage with these technologies, maintain high standards of care and uphold accountability in AI-assisted decision-making.

Building Workforce Skills and Public Engagement

As AI becomes more embedded in clinical settings, ensuring health professionals have the skills and knowledge to work alongside these technologies safely and effectively is increasingly important for maintaining high standards of patient care. At the same time, clinicians remain legally and ethically responsible for decisions supported by technologies they may not fully understand.

4 in 5 (81%) EU Member States are already actively involving stakeholders in shaping AI governance in health, exceeding the average across the broader WHO European Region. To build on this progress, the report encourages wider consultation with patients and the public to strengthen trust and ensure AI tools reflect the needs of those they serve. **The report highlights that systems developed with meaningful public input are better placed to earn lasting trust, support equitable outcomes and deliver on the promise of AI for all patients across the EU.**

Systems developed without meaningful public input, the report warns, may face resistance or rejection, regardless of their technical sophistication, and could exacerbate existing health inequities rather than reduce them.

The findings come at a pivotal moment, with the EU about to implement the world's first comprehensive legal framework specifically regulating AI, WHO/Europe encourages governments to build on this foundation by prioritizing 3 key areas:

- strengthening workforce readiness through education and training on AI fundamentals, ethics and data governance;
- ensuring inclusive and transparent engagement by involving health professionals, patients and the public in AI policy development; and
- establishing centres of excellence to test technologies, share best practices and develop common standards for safe and equitable implementation.

With AI set to play an increasingly central role in health-care delivery, the report underscores the need to align innovation with safeguards, skills and public trust to ensure that new technologies enhance patient care and overall health and well-being.

Digital Health Technologies in Europe: New EU Commission Report Highlights Opportunities and Challenges

Published in March 2026 by the European Commission's DG CNECT, the "Observatory for Digital Health Technologies in Europe" report provides the most comprehensive overview to date of the EU27 digital health market — flagging both extraordinary economic potential and structural challenges that nurses cannot afford to ignore.

Digital health technologies in Europe are a key pillar in transforming care systems, as highlighted in the new European Commission report, titled "***Observatory for Digital Health Technologies in Europe***". The report, prepared for the Directorate-General CONNECT (DG CNECT) by Capgemini Invent and IDC, provides a comprehensive overview of the EU27 digital health market, analyzing both the technology ecosystem and its economic impact.

The report is structured in three main sections. The first focuses on the creation of the Digital Health Technologies Observatory, a strategic tool for monitoring adoption, innovation, and investment in the sector. The second part presents the economic analysis of five selected technologies, while the third contains conclusions and policy recommendations.

The analysis draws on extensive data, including pan-European surveys of healthcare providers and technology companies, expert interviews, mapping of hundreds of providers, and analysis of tens of thousands of investment records. The findings depict a rapidly growing yet fragmented digital health market in Europe.

Artificial intelligence plays a central role in this transformation, with **94% of healthcare providers already adopting or planning to integrate it**. Technologies such as **Clinical Decision Support Systems (CDSS)**, **automated medical imaging analysis**, and **digital mental health platforms** are highlighted as particularly important for improving care quality and enhancing health system efficiency.

The economic benefits are substantial. CDSS are estimated to enable savings of up to **€252 billion over a decade**, while automated medical imaging analysis could save up to **€192 billion**. Similarly, digital mental health platforms support early intervention and reduce the burden on healthcare services, providing significant social and economic benefits.

The report also identifies critical challenges, such as market fragmentation, interoperability issues, and dependence on non-EU providers in strategic areas. Additionally, issues related to digital skills, regulatory frameworks, and equitable access continue to affect the widespread adoption of these technologies.

To address these challenges, the report recommends measures such as strengthening interoperability, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, promoting innovation in cutting-edge fields (such as AI and genomics), and integrating principles of sustainability, accessibility, and equity.

As Europe seeks to build a more resilient and inclusive health system, leveraging digital technologies emerges as a decisive factor in improving patient quality of life and the effectiveness of healthcare services.

To see the full report by yourself, you may visit the following website:

euagenda.eu/publications/observatory-for-digital-health-technologies-in-europe

Commission Announces New Global Health Commitments at One Health Summit

At the One Health Summit in Lyon last April, the European Commission unveiled major new global health commitments — totalling almost €800 million — that will reshape the European response to HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, antimicrobial resistance and neglected tropical diseases over the coming years.

The European Commission intends to pledge €700 million to the Global Fund to defeat HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. It will also invest €46.5 million to strengthen health security in Africa and Europe with a focus on tackling antimicrobial resistance (AMR), and €50 million in research and development for AMR and neglected tropical diseases. **Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jozef Síkela,** made these announcements at the One Health Summit taking place today in Lyon, France. They underline the European Union's continued leadership in global health and its commitment to strengthening the resilience of health systems worldwide.

The announcements are within the scope of the new Global Health Resilience Initiative, announced by **President von der Leyen** in the 2025 State of the Union address and which is expected to be launched before the summer. The initiative will offer the opportunity to clearly set out EU priorities and define concrete avenues for effective and efficient action on Global Health.

€700 Million to the Global Fund's 8th Replenishment

The Commission intends to pledge €700 million overall for the 8th replenishment of the Global Fund, with €185 million immediately available under the current long-term budget. The country-level grants resulting from the 8th replenishment will be implemented from 2027 to 2029.

The Global Fund is a worldwide partnership to defeat HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, which has saved millions of lives and significantly reduced mortality from the three diseases while investing in resilient and sustainable health systems and global health security. It focuses in particular on the most vulnerable populations at risk, especially women and girls who often face barriers to accessing lifesaving health services.

New EU Programmes Worth €46.5 Million on One Health Cooperation and the Response to AMR

EU investments of €46.5 million will help consolidate the African health security architecture and foster partnerships between European and African stakeholders, strengthening the One Health workforce and the response to AMR. The funding will support AMR surveillance, prevention and control at national, regional and continental levels, strengthen laboratory capacity and diagnostics across Africa, and increase cooperation between European and African health agencies over the next five years.

The implementation will be done together with key partners including the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the European Food Safety Authority, the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership and the International Centre for Antimicrobial Resistance Solutions.

Antimicrobial resistance is one of the most serious global health threats. If no action is taken, by 2050 it is projected to cause up to 10 million deaths annually, of which 4.5 million would be in Africa. AMR is already associated with more than **35 000 deaths annually in Europe,** and costs European healthcare systems an estimated €11 billion each year.

New R&D Investments of €50 Million in AMR and Neglected Tropical Diseases

The European Commission will make a **€30 million investment to support the development of new antibiotics and medical countermeasures against AMR.** The funding, managed by KfW, Germany's Development Bank, will support the not-for-profit organisations Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria Biopharmaceutical Accelerator (CARB-X) and the Global Antibiotic Research & Development Partnership (GARDP) to accelerate early-stage antibacterial research and to advance late-stage clinical development projects, ensuring a diversified and continuous pipeline for AMR medical countermeasures.

To further advance protection against global health threats, **the Commission had signed a €20 million contribution agreement with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD)** for the implementation of activities by the non-profit research organisation Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi), in support of the development of dengue medical treatments. This project was launched in March in anticipation of increasing needs for medical countermeasures against vector-borne diseases in the EU driven by climate change.

Background

The European Union's commitment to global health is set out in the EU Global Health Strategy adopted in 2022 and in the Global Gateway strategy, which identifies health as a key investment priority. The EU's global health engagement focuses on strengthening health systems, improving health security, supporting local manufacturing of health products, and advancing universal health coverage, especially in partner countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The EU participation in the One Health Summit is a milestone towards the upcoming Global Health Resilience Initiative, which will seek to deliver lasting impact for populations worldwide. A public consultation on the initiative is currently open until 13 April.

The Economic Case for Preventing Mental Ill Health

Key Takeaways From the 2026 OECD Health Policy Studies Report

Mental ill health is no longer just a public-health concern; **according to a new OECD Health Policy Studies report, it is one of the most under-recognised drags on Europe's economy.** Bringing together evidence from across OECD and EU27 countries, **the report makes a clear case that prevention is not only the right thing to do for citizens, but also a sound economic investment that governments, employers and health systems can no longer afford to delay.**

A Widespread and Deeply Unequal Burden

More than **one in five people across OECD and EU27 countries currently lives with a mental health condition,** ranging from anxiety and depression to alcohol use disorders. The human cost is striking: mental ill health is estimated to reduce healthy life expectancy by around 2.5 years on average, with major depressive disorders, generalised anxiety disorders and alcohol use disorders responsible for the bulk of this loss between 2025 and 2050.

The burden is also profoundly unequal. Young people, women and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately affected, both in terms of prevalence and in their ability to access timely, high-quality care. **Mental health, in other words, is also a social-equity issue, intertwined with employment, education and income.**

A 1.7% Drag on GDP — Every Year

The economic dimension is equally sobering. The OECD estimates that GDP in EU countries will be on average 1.7% lower each year than it would be without mental ill health, equivalent to an annual loss of around EUR 313 billion — a figure roughly comparable to the entire GDP of Czechia in 2023. **The cost arises mainly through three channels: lower labour-market participation, reduced productivity at work, and additional health-system spending.** Major depressive, anxiety and alcohol use disorders alone are projected to account for around 6% of total health expenditure over the coming decades.

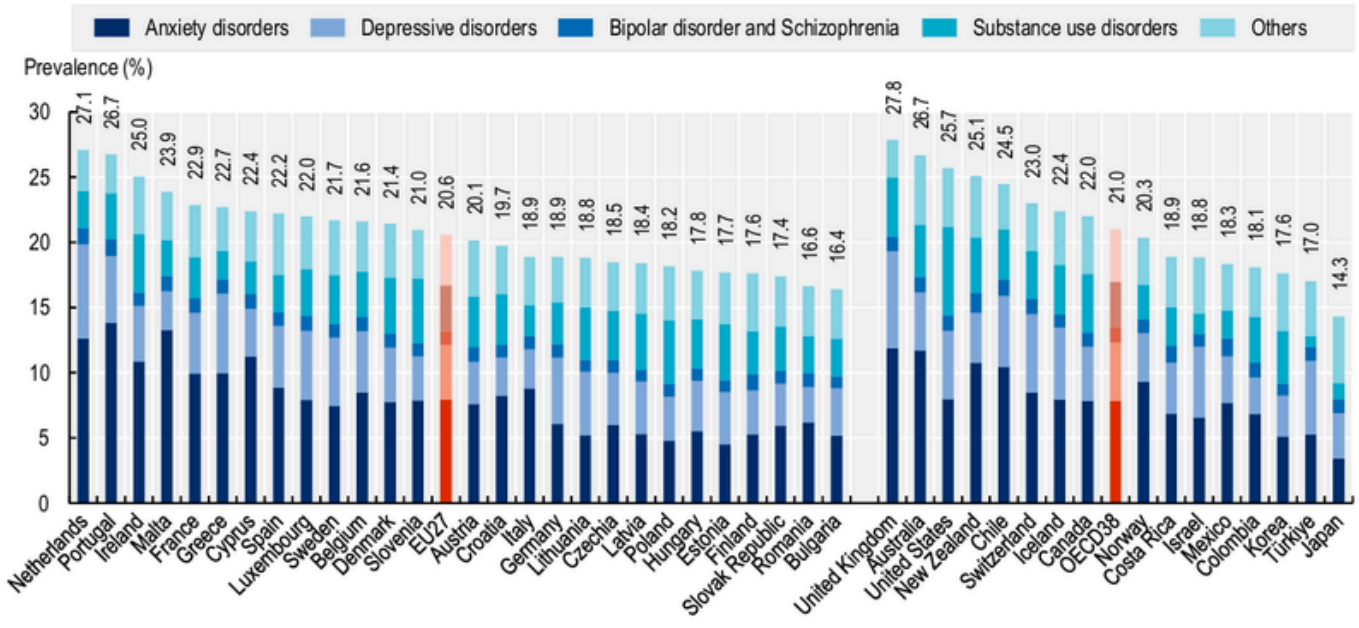
Crucially, these costs are not distributed evenly across the life course. Because mental health conditions often emerge in adolescence and early adulthood, their economic impact compounds over decades, undermining lifetime earnings, careers and contributions to public finances long after the first symptoms appear.

Prevention Works — and Pays

The most encouraging finding of the report is that this trajectory is not inevitable. Drawing on a wide body of evidence, **the OECD identifies five categories of interventions that can prevent or mitigate mental ill health: mental health literacy and stigma reduction, mindfulness- and exercise-based programmes, broader psychological interventions, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and pharmacological treatments.**

When subjected to economic analysis, **almost all of these interventions show benefit-cost ratios above 1 — meaning every euro invested generates more than a euro in economic benefit.** The standout case is a web-based intervention delivered in workplace settings, which is estimated to return around EUR 10.3 in GDP for every EUR 1 invested. Many programmes targeted at primary care, schools and the workplace are not only cost-effective but, in some cases, outright cost-saving for public budgets.

Figure 1.1. Estimates of prevalence of mental disorders in EU and OECD countries, 2023



The Implementation Gap

Despite this strong evidence base, **the report highlights a persistent and costly implementation gap. Effective interventions exist, but they are too rarely deployed at scale, reach only a fraction of those who could benefit, and are often disconnected from wider employment, education and social policies. As a result, the population-level impact of current efforts remains modest.**

The OECD calls for a more systemic approach: stronger integration of mental health into primary care, schools and workplaces; sustained investment rather than short-term pilots; better data and monitoring; and policies that tackle the structural drivers of mental distress, including precarious work, social isolation and inequality.

To see the full report:

OECD (2026), The Economic Case for Preventing Mental Ill Health, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. Executive summary available at: OECD Executive Summary.