Health in All Policies: All areas of policy need to face the challenge of securing a healthy Europe

Today at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG), plenary discussions focused on the concept of “Health in All Policies”. As many health determinants lay beyond the reach of the healthcare system in areas such as employment, education or economic policy, all policy decisions also need to take into account and examine any consequences these may have for the population’s health. All areas of policy are called upon to join forces in order to meet the goal of achieving a health-promoting policy framework.

On Thursday at the European Health Forum Gastein 2015 the well-known concept “Health in All Policies” (HiAP) was brought back to the table. It is common knowledge that health policy considerations need to be integrated in other sectors. The population’s health is indeed connected to just about all policy areas through common determinants such as education, income and socio-economic status. HiAP is closely linked to demographic change as well as an increasingly ageing population and thus a related tendency towards a higher incidence of chronic diseases and multimorbidities. The goals of the HiAP approach include improvements in preventative healthcare and disease prevention, securing health and universal healthcare, in particular for disadvantaged sections of the population.

Despite clear arguments in favour of cross-sectoral health policy, consistent implementation still often seems a long way off. Reason enough to put HiAP back on the table at the 18th EHFG.

Focus on possible solutions

“During the EHFG 2015 we were able to demonstrate the roles that are played or that could be played by various institutions in different areas of competence in the development of guidelines”, said Plenary Moderator Ilona Kickbusch (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva), summing up the discussions. “The HiAP debate focuses on, apart from a status analysis, developing possible solutions in order to identify and remove any obstacles that stand in the way of implementation and thus enable a positive impact on the health sector.”

The panel of experts reflected the cross-sectoral character of the topic. Along with several representatives from the European Commission, participants included Andrzej Rys (GD SANTE, Nina Renshaw (European Public Health Alliance), Richard Bergström (European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations) and Piroska Östlin (WHO Regional Office for Europe).

Piroska Östlin stated: “The WHO European Policy Framework for Health and Well-being (Health 2020) calls upon the health sector to reach out and work closely together with non-health-sectors and other stakeholders in order to be able to improve people’s health and well-being and to reduce health inequalities. This is because well-known factors and determinants that impact health are out of the reach and direct control of the health sector. In fact, intersectoral action through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches is our only option for addressing health determinants and health inequalities.”
About the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG)

The European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) offers a unique platform made up of and for experts, policy makers, opinion leaders and interest groups from the health policy field. Over the last 18 years, the EHFG has developed into an institution which addresses and discusses current and future trends and developments in European health policy and thus plays a role in shaping European health policy. The EHFG is in receipt of funding from various bodies including the European Commission, the Austrian Ministry of Health and the Province of Salzburg. The EHFG is organised by the International Forum Gastein (IFG).