Innovation is part of the solution to healthcare workforce shortages - Calling on EU Policy Makers to Action

What is the CEI Working Group?

The Working Group **on Capacity-Enhancing Innovation: freeing up resources within Healthcare Systems and improving patient safety and increased access to care** informs the content of this Call to Action**.** The group gathers expertise of various stakeholders in the field of healthcare such as professionals working in patient safety, nursing, health management, critical medicine, oncology, medication management, medical engineering, hospitals, and the medical technology industry.

This working group aims to **consolidate expertise and cultivate agreement on the key role of innovations in tackling healthcare workforce shortages in hospital inpatient care,** incorporating insights from professionals across the healthcare spectrum.

Through this initiative, we present EU leaders with **specific, actionable policy recommendations for harnessing innovations as a solution to the pressing healthcare workforce crisis, while also developing future-proof patient care models and infrastructures.**

Our healthcare systems are facing a growing challenge: a healthcare workforce crisis.

Healthcare systems are under pressure from an expanding ageing population, constrained budgets and the consequences of recent pandemics. The healthcare workforce is understaffed, stressed, and not well-distributed in terms of roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, the gap between demand for care and delivery of healthcare services is increasing across many health systems[1] with a significant impact on general population health through increase of waiting times for diagnosis and treatment (critical for survival rates diseases such as cancer) and increase in adverse events, compromising patient safety[2]. The need of the hour is to build resilient and sustainable healthcare systems, and capacity-enhancing innovations and future-proof patient care models can be one of the potent enablers of this objective.

Capacity-enhancing innovation (CEI) in healthcare and future-proof patient care models involve adopting new technologies, reorganising healthcare services and optimising patient care pathways to improve safety, efficiency and effectiveness, such as staff time and hospital beds. By empowering healthcare workers and improving overall population health, innovations as part of bundles to improve resource use and efficiency in patient care can outweigh their initial costs and are crucial for building resilience in healthcare systems with limited budgets.

In response, diverse stakeholders, ranging from industry leaders to policymakers, have advocated for multifaceted approaches to enhance healthcare system efficiency. Noteworthy among these strategies are **innovative health technologies and digital health solutions, alongside workforce training and development**. The challenges facing our healthcare system are substantial and carry significant risks for its sustainability. It is imperative to acknowledge the gravity of the situation and explore all potential solutions with urgency.

[1] Gupta Strategists (2021). Prevent the next wave (2021). Available at: https://gupta-strategists.nl/storage/files/Prevent-the-next-wave.pdf
[2] Elit L. Wait times from diagnosis to treatment in cancer. J Gynecol Oncol. 2015 Oct;26(4):246-8. doi:10.3802/jgo.2015.26.4.246.

While incorporating innovative health technologies into our healthcare pathways can play a crucial role in addressing Europe's current challenges, these technologies must not be viewed as a universal remedy but rather as part of a comprehensive approach. Proper integration into healthcare systems, alongside workforce development and strategic resource allocation, is essential to maximise their effectiveness and ensure sustainable outcomes.

Innovations as part of the solution to tackle health worker shortages.

Building on recent initiatives, including the Parliament's comprehensive report on the COVID-19 pandemic[3] and the WHO's adoption of a resolution for a framework spanning 2023 to 2030[4], there emerges a clear consensus on the **key role of health innovations in shaping the future of healthcare.**

As European policymakers increasingly recognise the significance of this issue, it is time to harness the benefits of innovation and collaboration to **forge resilient and sustainable healthcare systems for generations to come**.

Our 10 policy asks for EU action

Develop a Comprehensive Healthcare Workforce Strategy, integrating health technology innovation as a solution.

This approach aims to enhance system resilience, alleviate workload pressures, and mitigate workforce shortages. By embracing innovative solutions in this strategy, the EU can ensure the sustainability and adaptability of its healthcare system in response to evolving challenges.

1. Support an EU Health Workforce Strategy, building on the priorities of the Belgium Presidency and the Council conclusions on the Future of the European Health Union[5]. The EU should develop a comprehensive healthcare workforce strategy integrating health technology innovation as a solution, ensuring that efficiency indicators, like time to diagnosis and treatment, in main diseases are measured in the EU.
2. Emphasise the importance of restoring meaning to healthcare professionals' roles and of ensuring their physical and mental well-being, creating healthy working environments, investing in training and upskilling in particular on new technologies, and prioritising patient safety, access and quality of care within the strategy.
3. Facilitate dialogue and collaboration between technical experts, industries, healthcare professionals, regulators, and policymakers through defined stakeholder involvement and transparency to ensure the integration of innovative health technologies as part of future-proof care models and patient path solutions.

Mobilise Public funding and Public-Private Partnerships

Public funding and Public-Private Partnerships should be mobilised to develop and measure capacity-enhancing health technology innovation and the implementation of technology in patient path settings and the funding to support the enrolment of those care models and patient paths.

[3] REPORT on the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future | A9-0217/2023 | European Parliament (europa.eu)
[4] WHO/Europe's 53 Member States adopt historic resolution to protect and support health and care workers across Europe and Central Asia
[5] European Health Union: Council calls on Commission to keep health as a priority - Consilium (europa.eu)

4. Mobilise public funding and Public-Private Partnerships to develop and measure the impact on capacity-enhancing health technology innovation. Making sure transparency, accountability, and patient safety are ensured throughout the process.
5. Facilitate dialogue and collaboration between technical experts, healthcare professionals, regulators, and policymakers to ensure effective integration of new technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), prioritising patient safety and quality of care as central objectives.
6. Invest in clinical testing of digital health technologies and in digitalisation of health management systems to reduce waiting times, considering current developments of AI health technologies, to build an understanding of how systems that show high accuracy in testing will perform and impact real-world settings.

Establish EU- Member State Registries for Healthcare Resilience Indicators Surveillance

Implementing efficiency indicators through EU Member State registries will enable the systematic measurement of healthcare system efficiency and data-driven solutions across Member States. This initiative will not only foster transparency but also encourage the adoption of innovative technologies, thereby advancing healthcare standards throughout the EU.

7. Create efficiency indicators through EU registries to measure healthcare system efficiency and data-driven solutions for Member States. Such indicators should measure, for instance, waiting times for diagnostics and treatment in Member States enabling future measures to set maximum waiting times.

Advance Regulatory, HTA and Procurement Systems for Health Technologies

Regulatory, HTA and funding systems should be adapted to ensure the accelerated availability of breakthrough health technologies promote their adoption, and support healthcare facilities to enhance capacity, efficiency, and workforce outcomes.

8. Ensure that regulatory systems foster a dedicated pathway to ensure the accelerated availability of breakthrough health technologies enhancing capacity and efficiencies.
9. Establishing a framework for Health Technology Assessment and Public Procurement to actively promote and incentivise the adoption of capacity-enhancing health technology innovations that demonstrably improve health workforce capacity and enhance hospital efficiencies.
10. Provide support and resources to healthcare facilities to facilitate the safe adoption of healthcare technologies, emphasising the importance of restoring meaning to healthcare professionals' roles by empowering them to deliver care that is safe, effective, and aligned with patient needs and preferences.

Signatories of the Call to Action

Sign the Call to Action here:



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