Chapter 10
Towards European Modern Societies with Health Systems That Are Able to Add More Years to Life, But Also to Add More Life to Years

Androutsou Lorena
University of Thessaly, Greece

Androutsou Foulvia
University of Crete, Greece

ABSTRACT

The political context in Europe is changing including health. Among the priorities in seeking to influence the future of healthcare is a renewed attachment to health for all, health in all policies and a better coordination between social and health policy. Health issues are by definition international, and Europe has a duty to extend solidarity to the wider world population, in strategy and in delivery. Ensuring equitable access to high-quality healthcare constitutes a key challenge for health systems throughout Europe. The chapter will emphasise the importance of European public health policies. The chapter will offer a real opportunity to address public health areas and values such as right to access to healthcare into the detailed mechanisms of European policy. The chapter will form a tool for health leaders, to enrich their knowledge in the public health spectrum from a European perspective, to support, promote and improve healthcare access at a national level.

INTRODUCTION

The political context in Europe is changing including health. Health systems in EU Member States are varied, reflecting different societal choices. However, despite organisational and financial differences, they are built on common values, as recognised by the Council of Health Ministers in 2006 (Council Conclusions, 2006/C 146/01): universality, access to good quality care, equity and solidarity. The sustainability of national health systems is a core concern of the European Member States, the European Commission, and the World Health Organisation (WHO). The aim of the chapter is to offer insights for the health inequalities policies in the EU as a whole by presenting the most recent picture and trends across time.

BACKGROUND

Among the priorities in seeking to influence the future of healthcare, is a renewed attachment to health for all, health in all policies and a better coordination between social and health policy. High performing health systems are critical to address key health challenges faced by Member States in the European region, such as changes in disease burden and population dynamics, in governance and funding mechanisms, and in technology and clinical management practice (WHO, 2012). As outlined in the WHO report a set of key challenges facing health systems in the European region are:

- Ageing and the rising burden of (multiple) chronic conditions
- Unequal distribution of health across the region
- Financial crisis raises concerns of affordability and sustainability
- Access to technological advances and medicines
- Fragmentation, commercialisation and hospital-centric systems (WHO, 2012).

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WHO defined health systems as comprising 'all public and private organisations, institutions and resources mandated to improve, maintain and restore health. Health systems encompass both personal and population services, as well as activities to influence the policies and actions to address the social, environmental and economic determinants of health' (WHO, 2008a).

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