



Statement by EUPHANxt, the Law and Public Health section and the Public health policy and politics section Voting as a Pillar of Public Health

A call to vote

Health and democracy are inextricably linked.¹ Democracy thrives when citizens engage actively in the electoral process, expressing their will and aspirations through the power of their votes.² Their collective voices determine who will be entrusted with safeguarding the health and well-being of everyone and sends a signal about which policies they should adopt. Through this process, individuals can play a role in creating the laws that are passed³ and hold governments to account for their actions.⁴ For these reasons, the right to vote and public participation ‘lies at the core of democratic government’⁵. However, not everyone who can vote does so. If voting is the vital link between health and politics, then without active participation in the electoral process, this link will be broken. It is imperative that, by voting, we maintain and strengthen this crucial connection.

Narrowing inequalities

Voting is more than a civic duty; it is a fundamental instrument for advancing public health objectives. By voting, individuals can influence public policy, shaping the rules that impact the health of all of us.

This is especially important for the choices that are made about health systems, defined by the World Health Organization as something that ‘delivers preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative interventions through a combination of public health actions and the pyramid of health care facilities that deliver personal healthcare -by both State and non-State actors’.⁶ ‘Good service delivery’.⁷ But health systems must be designed in ways that allow them to respond to those in greatest need. Fundamentally, they are a means of redistributing resources, from healthy to ill,

¹ ‘Politics and population health: Testing the impact of electoral democracy’ by Patterson, A. C., & Veenstra, G. (2016). *Health & Place*, 40, 66–75. doi:10.1016/j.healthplace.2016.04

² ‘Safe and accessible voting: the role of Public Health’ by Ehlinger Edward P., MD, MSPH, Nevarez Carmen Rita, MD, MSPH; American Public Health Association (AJPH)

³ ‘Law, Democracy and the European Court of Human Rights’ by O’Connell, Rory. Cambridge University Press, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=6379866>.

⁴ ‘Voting and Human Rights in Democratic Societies’ by Bellinger, N. M. (2017). *Human Rights Review*, 18(3), 263–282. doi:10.1007/s12142-017-0451-9

⁵ UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote), The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, 12 July 1996

⁶ ‘Monitoring the building blocks of health systems: a handbook of indicators and their measurement strategies’ World Health Organization. World Health Organization, 2010.

⁷ Ibid. Defined by the World Health Organization as a building block of health systems.

from young to old, and from rich to poor. If they fail to do so they will widen inequalities. So we need political leaders who will make these often difficult choices.

But this is not the only area where voting can influence disparities in health.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us of the crucial role of those in power communicating pandemic-related information, implementing measures to mitigate its spread and allocating resources for healthcare. The political decisions they made determined COVID-19 responses, including vaccination policies and uptake⁹.

Conclusion

The links between democracy and public health are undeniable. Voting is more than a civic duty; it is a powerful means to advance public health objectives and narrow inequalities. By participating actively in the electoral process, citizens can shape public policy and determine who will be responsible for safeguarding the health and well-being of us all.

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Special credit to Teresa Calandri, lawyer at European Medicines Agency



The European Public Health Association (EUPHA) is the umbrella organisation for public health associations and institutes in Europe. EUPHA has 83 members from 47 countries. Our network brings together over 32,000 public health professionals. Our mission is to facilitate and activate a strong voice of the public health network by enhancing visibility of the evidence and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals. EUPHA contributes to the preservation and improvement of public health in the European region through capacity and knowledge building. We are committed to creating a more inclusive Europe, narrowing all health inequalities among Europeans, by facilitating, activating, and disseminating strong evidence-based voices from the public health community and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals to achieve evidence-based change.

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⁸ 'Politics and health: policy design and implementation are even more neglected than political values?' by Judge Ken; *European Journal of Public Health*, (Vol 18, Issue 4) August 2008, pp 355–356,

⁹ 'Political polarisation may affect attitudes towards vaccination. An analysis based on the European Social Survey data from 23 countries' by Wroblewski Michał, Meler Andrzej; *European Journal of Public Health*, (Vol. 34, No. 2), pp 375–379