



**Statement by European Public Health Association (EUPHA)  
President at the annual conference of the Austrian Public Health Association  
(ÖGPH)**

*The Austrian Public Health Association (ÖGPH) annual conference was held 23 and 24 May 2018 in Vienna, Austria. The theme this year was 'Health in all Societies'. In the afternoon of the first conference day, EUPHA president, Natasha Azzopardi Muscat, presented the European perspective on public health.*

Wednesday, 23 May 2018, Vienna

European Public Health has advanced considerably over the past 25 years. In 1993, for the first time, the European Union was given a formal mandate to address public health issues and complement the actions of individual Member States. The comparative study and research of health at population level also took on an important perspective around this time and last year EUPHA celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Whilst the research community and work in public health in Europe has grown, public health practitioners are facing considerable challenges in implementing research evidence in practice to improve population health at national and local levels. This is a result of a combination of factors including changing political landscapes, the after-effects of the financial crisis, socio-demographic shifts and new ways of communication. There has also been a growing sense of complacency that in Europe the major health scourges have been addressed with major increases in life expectancy having been achieved. The reality is that increases in life expectancy have been differentially distributed both between and within European countries. Health inequalities remain an important issue and are becoming a threat to societal cohesion. Risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol consumption and poor diets remain hugely important contributors to reductions in both life expectancy, disease burden and quality of life. Besides these traditional threats, Europe is also facing new public health threats such as social media impacts on mental health in adolescents and loneliness in the elderly.

The current opportunity for public health and health systems seems to lie in full engagement with the sustainable development goals which seek to address the lives of people, economic prosperity and the planet. There is however a risk that public health at European level is being gradually squeezed out and becoming peripheral on the agenda as the sustainable development goals are perceived as something that is on one hand global and on the other hand local. This risk is made more real with the discourse at European level being one where health is viewed as a 'small' thing and something that can be dealt with effectively at individual country level. Furthermore, specific initiatives such as vaccination or health technology assessment whilst both important and commendable, are being prioritised in the absence of a fuller societal approach to health improvement with an explicit commitment to address the political and commercial determinants of health.

The European Public Health Association, recognises that there is a need for public health research, advocacy and action at European level today, as much as ever before. Public health practitioners working at local, regional and national levels need to be well informed, networked and supported to be able to make a positive and meaningful impact. The European Union through its policies and programmes has the potential to shape the health and well-being of millions of EU citizens, citizens of neighbouring European countries as well as persons living further afield in other continents. The World Health Organisation, has made the pursuit and implementation of the sustainable development goals a top priority but it needs Europe engaged as an active and committed partner to deliver this ambitious agenda successfully.

As Austria takes on the mantle of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, there is a window of opportunity to shape and develop the health agenda for the European Union and beyond in the years to come. National public health associations can play an instrumental role in presenting the evidence and advocating for action.

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The European Public Health Association, or EUPHA in short, is an umbrella organisation for public health associations in Europe. Our network of national associations of public health represents around 20'000 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.

**EUPHA** - European Public Health Association

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