



## 14th European Public Health Conference

10 - 12 November 2021

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What have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic?

What are the public health challenges?

9 November 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust public health professionals into the spotlight like never before. They have had to make decisions with huge implications for society, often with limited information. They have made frequent media appearances, explaining the progress of the pandemic and setting out the reasons for their decisions. And they have learned an enormous amount in the process. On 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021 over 2,000 of them from across Europe will meet virtually at the 14th European Public Health Conference (#EPH2021) to share those lessons as they look forward to 'Public health futures in a changing world', the theme of the conference. To set the scene, leading public health researchers from across Europe have set out the lessons they have learned in a Supplement to the European Journal of Public Health (EJPH), one of the leading journals on public health in Europe.

We have to face the facts. Europe did not do well. The initial responses were often delayed and confused. The virus took advantage of fractures that had been opening up in many societies for a decade or more, leaving far too many people vulnerable, deprived of essential safety nets. Health systems risked being overwhelmed. Warnings that the question was not if but when a pandemic would strike had been ignored. So what needs to change?

**Prof Martin McKee**, one of the authors of the Supplement and President of the EPH Conference Foundation, says: "we should have learned from the response to the global financial crisis in 2008. Then we learned the importance of policies that gave people security, especially when they were at risk of losing their jobs and incomes. And we should have looked at what the financial sector did to prepare for a future crisis, measures that prevented the pandemic from becoming a financial crisis as well. So now we need to put the lessons that we should have learned before, but have had to learn during the pandemic into practice. We can look for inspiration to, for example, the Pan European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development, chaired by Mario Monti, the former Italian Prime Minister and European Commissioner, to which I was privileged to contribute, and establish a green recovery agenda to guide the post-pandemic era.



This is just the start. We need to improve the ways we communicate, with politicians, with each other, and with the public we serve. And we must act decisively against those who promote fake news.

But we must also see the positive side. The pandemic has shown what is possible with political will. Money can be found when it is needed, although it is far better to spend it on preparedness than crisis management. We should celebrate the remarkable achievements of biomedical researchers, bringing vaccines to market in record times.

We have a message for Europe. We must build back better. We need our political leaders to embrace policies that foster inclusiveness, investment and innovation, principles taken forward in the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development. In these, and in other initiatives, the European public health community must ensure that it is always ‘in the room where it happens’.”

#### **More information**

- Access the EJPB Supplement: [https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/issue/31/Supplement\\_4](https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/issue/31/Supplement_4)
- Website of the EPH Conference: <https://www.ephconference.org>
- About the European Public Health Association: [www.eupha.org](http://www.eupha.org)
- Press Registration: <https://ephconference.eu/press-information-128>

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