

Ursula Von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
European Commission,
B-1049 Brussels

Brussels, 10 April 2025

Subject: Open Letter from NGOs to the EU Commission - The importance of operating grants for civil society organisations in the field of health

Dear President,

Health civil society organisations are key partners to European and national institutions in shaping and delivering public health policies. They are vital bridges between policymaking and the communities they serve - professionally, efficiently, and democratically. This role was especially clear during COVID-19 pandemic, when civil society quickly mobilised to support policy, communicate strategies, and relay people's needs.

We, members of the [EU4Health Civil Society Alliance](#), gathering more than 30 health civil society organisations, representing health professionals, citizens, patients and public health organisations, and our key partners, **urge you to ensure immediate adoption of the 2025 EU4Health Work Plan, and approve full-year funding for civil society under existing Framework Partnership Agreements.**

April 2020, at the start of your previous mandate, remains in our collective consciousness as a moment when the world quite literally stood still. Since then, multiple crises have hit us, the challenges posed by the new US administration being but one such example, granting us no excuse to forget the lessons on the centrality of health and the importance of EU action and cooperation upon it.

The EU4Health Programme that entered into force in March 2021 was a welcome and unique opportunity to build stronger, better resourced, and more resilient health systems. The Programme addresses many crucial issues that will strengthen EU action in the field of health, and represents a key pillar towards building the European Health Union, bringing real added value for all Europeans.

Fast forward five years, with a quarter of the year already behind us, the 2025 Work Plan under the EU4Health Programme is nowhere to be seen. We are deeply concerned about the impact of this delay on the implementation of the EU4Health programme, including the loss of momentum in key EU health priorities, including cancer and non-communicable diseases, mental health, infectious diseases, preparedness, and health equity, which risk falling behind due to a lack of coordinated implementation.

We are equally alarmed by the impact of this delay on civil society organisations. This prolonged delay in providing operating grants, despite having signed Framework Partnership Agreements, will manifest itself in downsizing or closing the NGOs critical for delivering on the EU4Health objectives. At a time when our continent needs them most, dozens of public health professionals across Europe risk losing their jobs, their expertise dispersed. Undermining civil society in health also weakens Europe's scientific standards, silences evidence, and erodes our preparedness in the face of future crises.

Apart from operational disruption for civil society organisations, many of whom rely on this funding to maintain staff, deliver services, and plan activities throughout the year, consequences of the delay include undermining trust between the European Commission and long-standing partners in civil

society, and negative precedent for future multi-annual programmes, raising concerns about the reliability and predictability of EU funding mechanisms.

We trust you share our view that health is not a secondary concern but a core pillar of European security and resilience, as recognised in the EU's own strategies. After all, it is your leadership that has made the European Health Union a reality. We however question whether your new College shares that commitment. While some early promises to the European Parliament have been met, the silence on EU4Health funding speaks volumes.

The delay in publishing the EU4Health 2025 work programme is not a technical one. It is a direct threat to implementation of the public health policies and to reaching EU4Health's objectives. Equally, it is a direct threat to the stability and function of civil society actors who rely on annual grants to operate. For them, it is crucial that the operating grants cover the entire year, so not to penalise them for the late adoption of the workplan for which they have no blame.

President Von der Leyen, we call you to act with urgency: adopt a 2025 Workplan for EU4Health and guarantee full-year operational funding for civil society under the Framework Agreements. In light of the exceptional delay in publishing the annual work programme, we respectfully request that operating grants be awarded directly to all organisations holding valid Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs). These organisations have already undergone a rigorous and competitive selection process, and the FPA serves as a legally sound and transparent basis for such awards under the applicable provisions of the Financial Regulation.

Sincerely,

Signatories

1. European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
2. European Patients' Forum (EPF)
3. Alzheimer Europe
4. EURORDIS Rare Diseases Europe
5. Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)
6. Association of European Coeliac Societies (AOECS)
7. Cerebral Palsy in the European Union Association
8. Childhood Cancer International – Europe
9. Digestive Cancers Europe
10. EUROCAM
11. EuroHealthNet
12. European Association for Palliative Care
13. European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare)
14. European Central Council of Homeopaths (ECCH)
15. European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Association (EFA)
16. European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA)
17. European Heart Network (EHN)
18. European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA)
19. European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA)
20. European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)
21. European Public Health Association (EUPHA)
22. Fertility Europe

23. Health Action International (HAI)
24. International Diabetes Federation (Europe)
25. International Sport and Culture Association
26. International Federation of Anthroposophical Medical Associations (IVAA)
27. Lungs Europe
28. Mental Health Europe
29. Psychedelic Access and Research European Alliance (PAREA)
30. Smoke Free Partnership
31. TB Europe Coalition (TBEC)
32. Wemos

