



Joint statement on WHO/Euro RC72 agenda item 6: Strengthening health emergency preparedness, response and resilience: learning the lessons and building back better

September 2022

Dear Chair, President, Regional Director, honourable ministers, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

A year ago, the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development published its comprehensive and much valued report on lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic with recommendations for how to build back better. The update presented here during the Regional Committee shows that the Member States and WHO Regional Office for Europe have made good progress related to the four priority areas chosen: One Health; the Pan-European network for disease control; investing in health; and equitable access to vaccines and medical counter measures.

Although we realise that priorities need to be set because it is challenging to tackle all issues at once, we would like to stress the importance of not losing sight of the bigger picture. In this respect, we would like to draw attention in particular to Objective 2 of the Commission's report: *Take action at all levels of societies to heal the divisions exacerbated by the pandemic*. Quoting the Commission: 'We must close these gaps now; not just as a matter of fairness, but also to mend fractures in society, reduce polarisation and restore trust in public bodies. In doing so, we must constantly focus on sustainable change for the benefit of all, as set out in the SDGs.'

To address the root causes of our failures during the pandemic we need a value-driven approach and courageous decision-making. EUPHA and the co-signatories of this statement therefore call on European leaders to loudly and clearly say 'never again', and to not only build back better, but also bolder and broader, tackling the entire range of determinants of health, from the biological to the social, commercial, political and environmental. Member States must clearly embed into the preparedness and response strategies the climate change impacts on health that are already hitting Europeans, such as aggressive wildfires and floods and other extreme weather events and systemic changes in biodiversity. We must ensure that our efforts to rebuild are fair, inclusive, efficient, and informed by science. We need a strong focus on enhancing resilience and robustness of health systems, including the better integration of public health with medical and social care. Finally, visionary leadership and a genuinely collaborative effort including civil society actors will be indispensable¹.

Only by realising systemic and sustainable changes can we ensure that we will truly build back better and leave no one behind.

Thank you.

¹ The principles mentioned in this statement were drawn from the '[Berlin Statement](#)', which is a joint position of EUPHA and its members (national public health associations and organizations from across Europe), the European Public Health Conference, and their partners.

Co-signatories:

Alzheimer's Disease International – ADI; The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region – ASPHER; European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations – EFA; European Federation Of Nurses Associations – EFN; European Public Health Alliance – EPHA; European Stroke Organisation – ESO; Health Care Without Harm Europe – HCWH Europe; International Federation of Medical Students' Associations – IFMSA; The Task Force for Global Health – TFGH; Wemos.

