

## Written Statement by EuroHealthNet

### 74th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

*Provisional Agenda item 10 “Health emergency preparedness, response and resilience in the WHO European Region 2024–2029” (EUR/RC74/10)*

Dear Chair, Regional Director, honourable ministers, representatives, and distinguished delegates of the WHO European Region Member States,

EuroHealthNet welcomes the opportunity to comment once again on the Preparedness 2.0 action plan, following a robust consultative process.

The action plan is grounded in principles such as equity, community-centrism, good governance, and the One Health approach, reflecting lessons well-learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is divided into five crucial strategic areas. However, in the face of a health emergency, these strategic areas must be complemented by wider measures to support an effective response to the crisis. These include: a stronger focus on health promotion, cross-sectoral governance to address determinants of health, mental health and climate crisis mitigation.

**Health promotion:** *Strategic area 2: Community resilience and protection* aims to make community protection the end goal of emergency preparedness and response. The focus on a ‘dual-track’ and ‘whole-of-government’ responses is encouraging, as is the emphasis on participatory governance and equity. However, for these responses to be effective during crises, they must already function well in daily operations. We encourage aligning actions with the Framework for resilient and sustainable health systems in the WHO European Region (EUR/RC74/9) to create health-promoting systems that protect population health before and during crises. Such systems are effective “countermeasures” as they build trust and improve resilience.

**Cross-sectoral governance:** in *Strategic area 5: Emergency coordination*, we advocate for genuinely participatory governance structures which clearly define communities’ roles in an emergency response. We support the recommendations to maintain costed national action plans and utilise national public health institutes for coordination.

Effective emergency coordination should however, also consider the wider determinants of health, including education, job security, and access to nature. A cross-sectoral approach should be at the heart of emergency coordination, integrating health, education and employment sectors to address all factors impacting people's well-being.

**Mental health:** . *Strategic area 3: safe and scalable care* emphasises adaptable health systems for emergencies, but overlooks the need to scale mental health services, often excluded from national health care systems. Acknowledging emergencies' emotional and psychological toll, we recommend a dual-track approach to mental health, with surge capacity to address both community and health worker needs in times of crisis. Engaging local populations in co-creating mental health interventions and treating these services as essential "countermeasures" will ensure consistent community support.

**Climate crisis mitigation:** Finally, *Strategic area 1: Collaborative surveillance* rightly centres on harmonised surveillance across Europe and globally. We welcome the inclusion of early warning systems and environmental surveillance in the plan, as they are critical tools for staying ahead of these growing threats. Given climate change's role in increasing health emergencies, we urge a stronger focus on climate crisis resilience in the action plan. Through cross-sectoral collaboration, implementing adaptation measures to climate crisis, heat-health action plans and flood-resilient infrastructures, we can better protect vulnerable populations and enhance equity.

In conclusion, EuroHealthNet endorses this action plan and looks forward to support its implementation and strengthen the aspects of health promotion, cross-sector work, mental health and climate crisis mitigation of health emergency preparedness, response and resilience.

#### **Copenhagen, 31 October 2024**

EuroHealthNet is a leading not-for-profit European Partnership dedicated to improving health, equity, and well-being through coordinated action on the social and environmental determinants of health.