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## **Investing in public health – driving prosperity for the present and future generations**

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Countries across Europe and the World are faced with growing health, inequity, social security, economic and environmental challenges. We need urgent, innovative and priority-focused investment to ensure sustainable development for the present and future generations. Doing business as usual is unsustainable with high costs for individuals, families, communities, society, the economy and the planet. Governments can have a major impact on all factors influencing health and wellbeing, on the way people live and on their everyday choices. The interconnected nature of current challenges and possible solutions needs strong leadership, strategic and political commitment, and coherent action. It also requires new approaches and financing mechanisms building on cross-sector collaboration and citizen involvement in decision-making, i.e. participatory governance for health.

An overarching *Framework for investment for health and sustainable development (1)* has been developed recognizing the complex reciprocal link between investing in health and achieving prosperity for all. It supports the recently adopted WHO *Roadmap (2) to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (3) building on the Health 2020 Policy Framework (4)* in the European Region. A sustainable investment approach positions health as a driver of sustainability in the health sector; as well as an enabler of governance and regulatory processes that steer investment in other sectors which contribute to sustainable development, and hence to health and wellbeing. National and global prosperity, security and peace can be achieved only by developing dynamic, sustainable and inclusive systems, infrastructures and services across all sectors and levels, integrating health and equity into all policies.

Based on the most recent European evidence synthesis (1) *twelve key public health policies for priority investment* have been identified. All of them address areas of high health, social, economic and environmental burden and demonstrate strong co-benefits to achieving sustainable inclusive economic growth. The report uses a *Social Return on Investment (SROI) (5) approach*. This method aims to capture not only the financial benefit, i.e. monetary or monetarized economic and socioeconomic return on investment, but uses a wider concept capturing aspects across the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental value. These areas are:

1. Address social, economic and environmental determinants of health through a proportionate universalism approach
2. Ensure gender equity, women's and girls' rights and empowerment and address violence
3. Ensure the best start in life, leaving no child behind
4. Ensure early and youth education, health literacy and decent employment
5. Ensure healthy and active ageing
6. Reduce smoking, alcohol misuse, obesity, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity
7. Address noncommunicable diseases and communicable diseases
8. Ensure universal health coverage and minimize out-of-pocket payments
9. Strengthen public health systems, capacities and services to ensure health security
10. Transform, expand and optimize the health workforce

11. Establish healthy and health-enabling places, settings and resilient communities, including sustainable natural and urban environments
12. Ensure a green and circular economy (minimizing waste and negative impacts) with sustainable production, consumption and procurement

The evidence review has also identified three pathways through which investment for health and wellbeing drives (directly through the health sector) and enables (indirectly through other sectors) sustainable inclusive economic growth:

- 1) *A health and security pathway* through increasing life expectancy, improving quality of life, building human capital, enhancing labour productivity, and ensuring national and global health security;
- 2) *A social and equity pathway* through reducing the health gap along the social gradient and gender, building social capital, creating political stability, and achieving employment equity for women, young people and the poorest; and
- 3) *An economic and innovation pathway* through direct, indirect and induced economic effects, such as ensuring employment and decent jobs, building skills, delivering communications and logistics, creating competitive medical services and technological innovations (especially “walking the talk” by the health sector), etc. which drive sustainable production and consumption.

Looking forward, the developed framework for investment for health and sustainable development and the policy options suggested align with and support strategic processes and documents already in place with the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. A momentum is building for adopting new sustainable investment approaches driven by fair, rights-based, evidence-informed prioritization of resources across all sectors. Working together with people and communities in a participatory way (whole-of-society approach) as well as across different governmental sectors and levels (whole-of-government approach) is essential to inform, develop and implement successful policies that are conducive to health and sustainable development. Further work focusing on national and sub-national level is needed to translate regional and global commitment into transformational action to achieve prosperity for all now and in the future.

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