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## ***The EU needs stronger public health powers and better coordination of health research***

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to profound wounds across all the EU. Initial responses were described as slow and uncoordinated, not only at [EU level](#), but also [globally](#). Scientific uncertainty about the virus, the difficulty of implementing highly restrictive measures, lack of preparedness, and dissimilar capacities of national and regional health systems did not help. However, the limited EU public health response was aggravated by its limited powers vis-à-vis Member States. These limits should be better evaluated after the crisis unfolds. After initial difficulties, the EU has activated numerous responses in support of Member States. These include a public procurement system to stockpile medical supplies ([rescEU](#)), an [Emergency Support Instrument](#) to procure medical equipment, recommendations for [community measures](#) and [guidelines for lifting lockdown measures](#), as well as a [global response](#) to support the development of diagnostic tools, therapies and vaccines for COVID-19.

Although laudable, these measures are far from addressing the health needs of citizens and healthcare systems across the EU. High expectations (from EU citizens) need to confront the reality that [EU public health powers vis-à-vis Member States remain very limited](#). The FEAM Board believes that an inclusive dialogue is needed to reflect and take stock of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 outbreak.

We therefore join the voices of other [stakeholders](#), [civil society](#), and the [EU Parliament](#), calling for dialogue and the potential deepening of EU powers to coordinate public health and health research alongside EU Member States.

There is substantial *de facto* EU integration in public health, including through the recognition of university degrees, the mobility of healthcare workers, and the major impact of health crises, which do not stop at the borders. Health care approaches and requirements need to respond to the increasing need for coordination and orchestration at the EU level.

**The FEAM Board therefore calls for:**

1. The approval of the [EU4Health Programme](#) as proposed by the EU Commission for 2021-2027 in line with a recent [resolution of the European Parliament](#);
2. The creation of an expert Task Force to review challenges and opportunities to strengthen the role of the EU to coordinate emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, antimicrobial resistance, shortages of medicines, or the complex effects of migration and climate change in health. A wide and inclusive dialogue with other stakeholders, Member States and EU Institutions, would be key to design suitable proposals and significantly improve the coordinating role of the EU. **FEAM offers to be an active part of this Special EU Task Force;**

3. The Task Force should clearly identify and examine areas where the optimal provision of healthcare should be facilitated through cooperation between the EU and Member States;
4. In addition, ongoing reflections such as the need for health economic evaluation of innovations (HTA) on a pan European level (avoiding duplication and waste of resources), enhancing equal access to all EU citizens, and decreasing health inequalities should be assessed;
5. The Task Force should also consider other areas where the EU could lead to stronger coordination with the appropriate funding and political will, including the use of artificial intelligence for large clinical databases and European clinical trials, and the EU role in coordinating research and innovation, including for clinical research defining optimal therapeutic strategies and without commercial aim.

The FEAM Board believes that the current crisis should lead to address urgent problems, but also to a much longer-term discussion inspired by the EU values of solidarity and sustainability, which may include a redefinition of public health and health research coordination at the EU level.

The 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Union has coincided with a major public health crisis. Deeper EU integration during the past decades provides an additional reason to revise progress, and to confront EU's great capacities in terms of education, training, and research and development, with its current limitations. The FEAM Board believes that this dialogue could also take place in the context of the "[Conference on the future of Europe](#)", which will provide an opportunity to renew the pact between EU citizens and Member States, and calls for the Conference to start as soon as possible.

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