

## New Economic Alliance of the WHO EURO Well-being Economy Initiative

### **Fostering a culture of health for all in government recovery plans – *building a healthier and fairer future for all***

#### Context

There is an unprecedented understanding among the public, governments, and the international community that health is critical to the stability, resilience and sustainability of our societies and economies. This has been demonstrated during the height of the pandemic, and it is vital now as we focus on transitioning from response to recovery and efforts to build a better future.

The pandemic has touched people in all countries and has affected all aspects of our daily lives. However, the effects have been more devastating for those who were already living in poor health, in poor quality homes, in underdeveloped, fractured communities and at risk of poverty and discrimination. In addition, new vulnerabilities have emerged, particularly among workers in sectors and areas hit hardest by the pandemic such as tourism, transportation, retail and hospitality. Jobs in these sectors place people in close proximity to large numbers of the public and mostly cannot be done from home. Yet they are also generally poorly paid and with poor benefits, meaning workers are ill-equipped to manage income losses due to pandemic-induced closures or isolation and recovery due to infection unless generous statutory unemployment and sick leave schemes are in place.

We will not be able to move forward when so many in our societies are falling behind. Closing gaps in health and well-being within and across countries of the European Region is therefore not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do for any country that is committed to building a better future.

A major priority is to make sure that we level up health for all and invest in equity-sensitive policies and systems that leave no one behind. Within the health sector, large strides can be made through strengthening universal coverage, removing impoverishing co-payments and scaling up gender-responsive primary care based on multidisciplinary models of delivery implemented in partnership with community-based organisation.

We know that we are not alone in taking action to build a fairer and healthier future. Across governments, other ministries want vibrant economies, nonviolent societies, well-educated and informed citizens, and resilient, sustainable environments, as described by the Sustainable Development Goals and its core vision of “leaving no one behind”. There is a way to realise all these goals together, one requiring participatory democracy and co-creation of solutions, applying new economic thinking that puts the well-being of all people at its heart and fundamentally challenges what is valued in the economy. Health equity is core to this vision.

## New Economic Thinking: A New Way

Protecting and improving health equity pays dividends, or has co-benefits, across the other major agendas of sustainable development – social development and cohesion, environmental sustainability, and inclusive economic growth. Putting these co-benefits to work, across sustainable development agendas and across sectors, requires demonstrating and quantifying their value in a common ‘solution space’. Such a space can have a wide remit, housing thinking and approaches that can yield solutions with often substantial but overlooked public value and benefits that spill over across agendas and sectors.

Governments have a key role in nurturing this wider conception of public value, and above all, well-being for all as the ultimate public value both now and in the future. The public health sector needs to join forces with other public sectors to define and leverage this common solution space around prioritising public goods for health equity such as decent and affordable housing, universal social protection, secure employment and healthy working conditions, universal digital connectivity and the green economy. These bring co-benefits for health, human capital, fiscal stability, inclusive growth and social cohesion.

We know that existing economic approaches and solutions are not working for many in our society. They have generated persistent health income and wealth inequities. Social mobility and balanced development have stalled, and trust in and the resilience of public systems is strained. The pandemic has put a spotlight on these structural weaknesses and shows how fragile this imbalance has made societies in their ability to withstand crises.

We need both new economic thinking and mainstream approaches to accelerate work to move beyond measuring progress by GDP and financial returns alone. This new economic thinking must recognize and value the interdependence of economies, societies, people and the environment in generating well-being. Prosperous societies and economies require harnessing the connections between these systems by the way in which they generate resilience, sustainability, inclusivity, and deliver the essential conditions needed for economic, social, human and environmental capital and well-being. This requires adopting a multidisciplinary lens and integrating economic perspectives from the social sciences more broadly.

## The WHO EURO Well-being Economy Initiative

Whilst there is unprecedented convergence on the major challenges and nexus of unwanted scenarios to be overcome in the long-term recovery from the pandemic, there is less common understanding on the solutions and the know-how. Without building this common ground, when services resume and decisions about major investment and recovery policy are being made, there will be missed opportunities to build back healthier societies and economies that are sustainable, inclusive, gender responsive, and enable all people to live a healthier life and to prosper.

Supported by and in partnership with the Ministries of Health and governments of Finland and Wales, the work of the ‘Well-being Economy Initiative’ aims to redefine the long-term solutions space in recovery from the pandemic, to prevent countries falling into old patterns of solutions that prioritise restoring only immediate economic growth while neglecting the foundations needed to sustain that growth. Solutions in the redefined space of a well-being economy are ones that leverage the co-benefits across investments in health, economic, social and environmental development.

Through this initiative, WHO EURO is convening countries and stakeholders around a new common space of solutions that prioritise and leverage the co-benefits of investments across social, economic, health and environmental policies. The work will demonstrate the incentives for pursuing recovery strategies that leverage these types of solutions, and will include a review of the evidence and available scientific literature from before and during pandemic. In aligning incentives across the many sectors and parts of society, we are better enabled to rebuild healthy places where every life matters and all people can prosper.

This work directly contributes to implementing European Program of Work (EPW) delivery of the WHO European Level commitment to support Member States to strengthen cross sectoral policies on the determinants of health equity as set out in the WHO EURO Resolution on Healthy Prosperous Lives for All (EUR/RC69/R5). Specifically, the commitment to provide Member States with evidence, tools and innovative approaches to support their efforts to close gaps in health and to report back on implementation to the EURO Governing Bodies at the 73rd Meeting of the Regional Committee for Europe, in 2023.

### The New Economic Alliance

WHO EURO, through the Centre of Excellence in Venice, is convening a time-limited multidisciplinary expert group, a New Economic Alliance, to facilitate the implementation of WHO EURO Resolution on Healthy Prosperous Lives for All (EUR/RC69/R5). The New Economic Alliance will contribute to generating cutting-edge evidence and methods that enable ministries of various sectors and governments to make the case for, prioritize and scale up innovations (scientific, technological, social, business or financial) in order to: increase equity in health; and ensure that the social values of solidarity, equity, well-being, inclusion and gender equality are considered and included in growth and development policies.

The expert group will represent a wide range of disciplines and methodologies. This will foster integration of traditional economic measures with subjective measures and broader indicators such as trust, social cohesion and sense of belonging, building upon recent work of WHO EURO. At the same time, qualitative evidence from case studies will reveal how the well-being economy works in practice, which will complement the collection of indicators and quantification of co-benefits, and help identify the opportunities and risks from spillover effects between health equity and other sector agendas. The New Economic Alliance will therefore take a holistic approach to quantifying and modelling the well-being economy, as well as supporting the creation of practical tools to help policymakers implement specific well-being economy approaches in practice.

This will include input to the development of a conceptual framework, methods and modelling of (i) public health investment and its co-benefits for social, economic and environmental development, (ii) leveraging investments in other sectors that produce benefits for health and equity, and (iii) building a knowledge base of practical implementation approaches driven by social values such as well-being, inclusion, equity, gender equality and sustainability.

In this approach, equity and well-being (with mental health as a tracer issue) are treated as optimisers in generating sustainable and resilient recovery, economic growth and social cohesion. The work will also contribute to strengthening the leadership capacity of health authorities to align

policies across sectors that promote social and human capital, economic inclusion and mental well-being in recovery plans.

The model will be piloted in a minimum of three Member States (including Finland and Wales) and use the results in cross-sectoral policy dialogue events to make the case for investing in policies for health equity and social protection as a prerequisite for economic stability and social progress.

Governments adopting this approach systematically will work across sectors, realign investment and redesign economies to secure the well-being of people and the planet. In doing so, they will honour existing global and European commitments such as the Global Program of Work (GPW) and the European Program of Work (EPW) Triple Billion targets, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Tallinn Charter on Health Systems for Health and Wealth, and the WHO EURO Resolution on Healthy Prosperous Lives for All (EUR/RC69/R5).

## Membership

The New Economic Alliance will be a multidisciplinary expert group, generating cutting-edge evidence and methods enabling ministries across sectors and governments to make the case for, prioritize and scale up innovative actions that treat health and health equity as optimizers in generating sustainable and resilient recovery, economic growth and social cohesion.

Members will comprise experts from Scientific and Policy Research Institutes from a variety of disciplines including Political Science, Applied Economics, Public Health, Gender and Rights, Anthropology, Environment, and Finance. A Scientific Lead and Co-Chair will be appointed from among the members of the Alliance, alongside two country partner Co-Chairs. WHO will function as Secretariat to the Alliance.

The New Economic Alliance will support the preparation of the Well-being Economy Initiative and provide the highest level of scientific leadership for the work. Members of the New Economic Alliance will provide expert guidance and support on:

- Development of the conceptual framework for modelling co-benefits in a well-being economy approach
- Development of co-benefit analysis methods and models
- Development of underpinning scientific and policy documents
- Support to live policy sites to apply models and assess impacts or effects
- Advocacy to promote the aims and findings of the project
- Participation in at least 2 key milestone events:

**(1) The Regional Well-being Economy Conference and Solutions Forum, November 2022**, which will bring together Member States, international organizations and civil society to share real world solutions and lessons learned on implementing the well-being economy. The Conference will be a forum to strengthen country alliances and reinforce political and policy action to advance healthier and resilient lives and livelihoods for all in the WHO European Region.

(2) **The 2023 WHO Regional Committee for Europe, July 2023 – September 2023**, the annual meeting of WHO EURO’s decision-making body, where Member States formulate regional policies, recommend and supervise WHO EURO’s activities, and approve the proposed programme budget. The WHO EURO Resolution on Healthy Prosperous Lives for All (EUR/RC69/R5) is committed to reporting on the implementation of the resolution at the 2023 Regional Committee.

#### Provisional Partners / Members

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