

Technical Document on the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 – Focus on Health

(Drafted by [Programma Mattone Internazionale Salute – ProMIS](#) in January 2026)

This document, addressed to policy makers and programme planners in the public health sector, aims to underscore the need to maintain a dedicated programme for European health policies, such as EU4Health. This need is made even more evident by the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has unequivocally demonstrated the fragility of national health systems and the urgency of coordinated European action with adequate resources to build a true European Health Union.

In the European Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, health will no longer have a separate funding programme comparable to EU4Health: health measures will be integrated into broader programmes and instruments (which provide for the same mechanisms as the PNRR), with a cross-cutting approach.

RATIONALE

Post-2027 European programming poses significant risks to public health: the dilution of health among competing priorities and the fragmentation of programmes reduce visibility and resources, while the centralisation or non-renewal of collaborative instruments, such as Regional Programmes, Joint Actions and Joint Transnational Calls of European Partnerships, limits participation and the exchange of good practices, as well as the loss of capacity building acquired and structured over the years by regions and networks of regions. The lack of specific health recommendations and weak multi-level governance compromise the coordination and implementation of NRPPs, exacerbating pressures on regional health systems.

The principle “health in all policies” is a fundamental value that must be preserved in order to foster cooperation between different sectors. However, without a dedicated programme such as EU4Health, there is a risk of fragmentation of interventions and a loss of a coherent approach. To be effective, the principle of “Health in All Policies” needs a central pillar of coordination and funding to ensure strategic coherence and guide synergies, a role that EU4Health has successfully fulfilled to date. Without this oversight, the principle risks becoming a cause of resource dispersion rather than a driver of integration. **To ensure the continuity of synergistic work between the various sectors and that public health remains a consistent and well-supported priority at European level, It would be appropriate for the European Commission to review its proposal and ensure that EU4Health is maintained in the post-2027 programming period.**

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH IN POST-2027 EUROPEAN PROGRAMMING

Risk of losing focus on health and fragmentation of funding: the dilution of health among multiple priorities, without dedicated oversight, combined with the fragmentation of programmes and lack of consistency in funding, risks reducing visibility and resources for healthcare and hindering integrated

pathways from research to implementation. The risk is that health will become a “cross-cutting” component without dedicated oversight and with dispersive effects: many opportunities, but less capacity to build integrated and scalable pathways “from research to implementation”, especially if national choices favour areas perceived as more immediately economic or industrial.

Risk of loss and centralisation of collaborative tools: EU4Health has consolidated cooperative tools (e.g. Joint Actions) which, by their nature, facilitate harmonisation, transfer of good practices and co-design between Member States. If health is absorbed into broader instruments, technical cooperation must be prevented from becoming marginalised or more “top-down”, with countries having less capacity to guide content and learning-by-doing. These tools are the operational engine for building a European Health Union, as they create the networks and expertise needed to address cross-border threats and harmonise standards of care. Their loss or weakening would represent a step backwards from the political objectives declared by the EU itself. At the same time, the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) currently provides tailor-made, demand-driven support without co-financing, which is useful for accompanying reforms in the health sector. Any recalibration or reduction of its role (in a context of rationalisation of instruments) would diminish the capacity to transform European priorities into concrete reforms.

National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) without adequate European recommendations on health: since National and Regional Partnership Plans will become the main tool for reforms and investments, specific European recommendations on health would be necessary. However, Italy has never received structured guidance on the health sector within the European Semester, with the risk that NRPPs will not fully integrate public health and system transformation priorities. Without a flagship programme such as EU4Health to define strategic priorities at EU level, it is even less likely that the European Semester will produce strong and specific health recommendations, leaving National Plans without clear guidance and an incentive for alignment. A standard “pathway” linking Horizon Europe (R&I) to NRPPs (adoption/scale) would be desirable to prevent health innovations from remaining “prototypes”.

Complex multilevel governance to implement reforms: effective implementation of NRPPs requires solid coordination between central government and regions. In Italy, the historical complexity of multi-level governance can result in: (i) uneven implementation times; (ii) disparities in planning and management capacity; (iii) the risk of reforms being formally planned but not implemented uniformly. In the health sector, this can amplify regional inequalities and make it more difficult to establish common standards and replicable models.

Weakening of the role of local authorities and healthcare cooperation: the lack of integration of the regions in the governance of the MFF, together with growing pressure on local healthcare systems and reduced support for cooperation – including cross-border cooperation – risks weakening the ability of local authorities to access adequate resources, collaborate effectively and respond in a coordinated manner to healthcare challenges and crises. This is particularly critical in healthcare, because many levers (prevention, chronic conditions, proximity, social and healthcare integration) are territorial. Furthermore, cooperation between healthcare systems requires tools and rules that enable operational partnerships; without dedicated oversight, such collaborations risk becoming residual compared to the more “vertical” priorities of the new system. In this sense, it is essential that health is also treated as a lever for cohesion and not just competitiveness, with territorial indicators and a focus on vulnerable populations.

Weak integration of prevention and innovation in regional systems: the Horizon Europe proposal emphasises correctly speed and simplification (open topics, unified rates, reduced timescales), but this does not automatically guarantee transfer to regional health systems. Without an explicit “implementation pathway” (from research to adoption) and without indicators that measure not only scientific output but also health outcomes, innovation risks remaining confined to projects and trials. At the same time, prevention—which requires continuity and multi-stakeholder action—may be penalised if plans favour investments that are more visible in the short term. This is particularly worrying in the context of an ageing population (the proportion of over-65s in the EU is expected to increase from 22% in 2024 to 29% in 2050) and a growing burden of chronic diseases, which are already the leading cause of death and have an estimated economic cost of hundreds of billions of euro per year (e.g. €282 billion for cardiovascular diseases alone).

Risk of widening territorial and social inequalities in health: the Commission sets convergence targets and also provides for minimum targets for social dimensions, but without specific oversight of health—including vulnerable populations and social determinants—there is a fear that health measures will not be sufficiently equity-oriented and that health gaps will widen. Existing disparities are already alarming, with significantly higher cardiovascular mortality rates in Eastern Europe and an estimated shortage of 1.2 million health professionals in the EU. A dedicated programme is essential to fund actions aimed at reducing these inequalities, strengthening the health workforce and ensuring more equitable access to care, treating health as a pillar of European social cohesion.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU4HEALTH PROGRAMME

Mid-term evaluation of the EU4Health Programme in Europe

The **mid-term evaluation of the EU4Health Programme** confirms the Programme as a key element of the Union's strategy to promote resilient, modern health systems capable of responding to the evolving needs of the European population.

The EU4Health Programme, which has a total budget of **€4.6 billion for the period 2021-2027 (increased tenfold as a result of the Covid-19 crisis)**, continues to represent a cornerstone in the development of a system capable of supporting coordinated, sustainable and prevention-oriented interventions.

The interim evaluation analyses the actions launched by the **EU4Health Programme between January 2021 and April 2024**, highlighting steady progress in activities and increasing use of the tools made available by the programme. The published data show the signing of **726 contracts** involving a wide and diverse network of entities, including ministries of health, public institutions, scientific organisations, non-governmental organisations and private sector entities. The supported initiatives saw **the participation of 22 countries and 499 organisations** engaged in joint actions, helping to create a collaborative health ecosystem in which skills, resources and knowledge are shared in the collective interest.

The areas **in which particularly significant progress has been made** include preparedness and response to health crises, health promotion, prevention of non-communicable and communicable diseases, implementation of structured initiatives in the fight against cancer, and ongoing support for European reference networks dedicated to rare diseases. The evaluation also notes that the EU4Health Programme is gradually consolidating its role as a driver of European health innovation, including through support for projects that promote the use of new technologies, improve data collection capacity and adopt more integrated care models.

The strategic importance of the programme is also evident in its contribution **to building more equitable and efficient health systems**. The initiatives funded have supported measures aimed at improving access to care, the availability of specialist skills, the harmonisation of standards and the dissemination of good practices among Member States. The evaluation also highlights a growing

focus on strengthening the capacities of health professionals and disseminating policies geared towards wellbeing and prevention through targeted measures involving different levels of health governance.

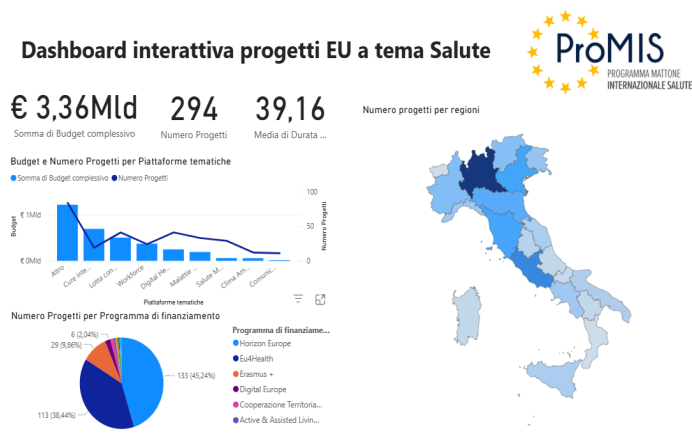
Improvements have been recorded **in governance, coordination processes between Member States and the ability to adopt evidence-based tools for analysing and managing emergencies**. Significant progress has also been made in strengthening data collection systems, improving digital infrastructure and developing useful methodologies for monitoring the health status of the population.

Analysis of the implementation of the EU4Health Programme in Italy

As a tool for understanding and analysing current European programming, ProMIS has developed the [CruSEU](#) tool.

This tool has highlighted how Italy's participation in EU programmes can be interpreted not as a series of isolated cases, but as part of a **structured ecosystem** characterised by:

- strong project design capabilities;
- solid multi-level coordination;
- increasing alignment with European strategic priorities.



The **EU4Health Programme is one of the areas in which Italy, already in the public sector, is showing the most significant results, together with the Horizon Europe Programme.**

In the 2021-2027 programming period, **with a total of approximately €1.39 billion in EU contributions** committed under the EU4Health programme, there are **approximately 138 projects** involving Italian beneficiaries, with **a total estimated economic value of approximately €144.4 million**, corresponding to **more than 10% of the total funding allocated**¹. Considering the total of 37 countries (27 EU Member States, 3 EEA countries and 7 candidate countries) that are eligible for funding under the Programme, albeit under different rules, the 10% result is even more significant.

The 138 projects cover the entire spectrum of the programme's priorities: **preparedness and response to health crises, prevention and health promotion, the fight against cancer, strengthening digital health, rare diseases and European Reference Networks (ERNs), training, skills and capacity building.**

This participation can, and should, be viewed within the context of a broader national strategy that harnesses the potential of the EU's 2021–2027 programmes and supports a modern, digital healthcare model that is integrated into European governance.

¹ The data relating to Italian participation and the corresponding economic value is based on a **preliminary extraction from the Funding & Tenders Portal**, carried out considering EU4Health projects with at least one **public** beneficiary established in Italy. The economic value represents **the sum of EU contributions associated with Italian beneficiaries** and may be subject to slight variations depending on contractual updates, financial adjustments or additional allocations during the programming period.

The 138 projects have led to the **creation of networks**: *Regions and Regional Health Systems with strong planning capabilities; IRCCS and clinical research institutes of international importance; Regions and Regional Health Systems with strong planning capabilities; Experimental Zooprophyllactic Institutes*, which are fundamental for veterinary and zoonotic coordination; numerous universities and research centres.

This participation can, and must, be viewed within the context of a broader national strategy that harnesses the potential of the EU's 2021–2027 programmes and supports a modern, digital healthcare model that is integrated into European governance.

It is also important to remember that Italy has been coordinating the NFP4health Joint Action for more than five years now. Funded under the EU4Health Programme, now in its second edition, it cooperates in building the capacities of focal points in all Member States and implementing the results of the Programme in regional and local areas.

Annex 1: ProMIS presentation sheet

<p>What it is</p>	<p>ProMIS is an institutionalised network formally joined by the Ministry of Health, all Regions/PPAAs, the National Institute of Health (ISS) and the National Agency for Regional Health Services (Agenas).</p>
<p>Mission</p>	<p>ProMIS's mission is to promote healthcare in the Regions/Public Administrations in Europe and worldwide, as well as Europe and the world in the healthcare systems of the Regions/Public Administrations, within the framework of synergistic collaboration with the Italian system.</p> <p>ProMIS's work is based on the belief that local and regional health authorities play a key role as the natural interface between citizens and national and European institutions in defining health policies, improving the efficiency and quality of health systems and services, and promoting public health.</p> <p>ProMIS stems from the idea of responding to a need (national, regional or an expression of EU priorities) that finds a common denominator in the desire to achieve results that benefit everyone and bring mutual knowledge. The exchange of approaches, experiences and models with other countries creates useful tools, strengthens capacities and skills to improve one's own and propose targeted interventions.</p> <p>ProMIS plans its activities in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotion of regional systems and perspectives at national and EU level (Advocacy) ○ Information/Communication ○ Training ○ Technical support for co-programming activities ○ Support for the capitalisation and sustainability of results/products ○ Facilitation and creation of opportunities and collaboration/discussion ○ Development/growth of regional organisational models for the internationalisation of health systems ○ Creation/strengthening of intra- and inter-regional institutional and technical links ○ Creation/strengthening of inter-regional relations and relations with MdS/Agencies/National Institutions ○ Participation in European processes ○ Access to and use of EU funds
<p>What it does</p>	<p>ProMIS identifies the training, information, research, innovation and collaboration needs of the European Health System, translating them into actions across multiple levels and systems. It also creates networks with a multiplier effect, generating culture and added value.</p> <p><i>Strategic Objective</i> Contributes to the growth of health as a system from an international and European perspective, strengthening the skills of stakeholders through exchanges of regional, national and European approaches, experiences and models, and the development of European-level initiatives.</p> <p><i>Operational Objectives</i> Strengthens the internationalisation strategies of regional health systems Promotes and supports complementary EU initiatives at regional level in synergy with different policies Consolidates the structured link for the internationalisation of the Italian health system between regional and national levels Promotes and supports the European “health in all policies” strategy at national level Support and promote actions to contribute as a country system to the strategic development of European programming Increase networking capacity</p>

