

Tonio Borg

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health

Commissioner Borg delivers speech on Active and Healthy Ageing

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Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health, attends the opening of the 2nd Conference of Partners: European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing

Brussels, Belgium, 25 November 2013

SPEECH

Ministers,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to this Conference under the European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing.

And I am pleased to see so many people here today; and so much commitment to shaping innovative solutions that make a difference: for our elderly citizens; for our health systems; and for the economy as a whole.

For those of you coming from sunnier countries than Belgium, you can feel that it is winter outside. But the good news - for Europe's economy - is that we are finally seeing the end of a five-year long winter.

We can now detect some positive signs that the European Economy is starting to recover.

- Growth is slowly returning in several Member States;
- Confidence is gradually rising amongst consumers and businesses.

As part of their effort to overcome the crisis, Member States are focusing heavily on how to make their public sectors more efficient. This of course includes the healthcare sector – which accounts for some 9% of European GDP.

Europe's health systems need in-depth reforms now – so that our citizens can benefit from high quality, efficient and sustainable health systems in future.

Such reforms take time, commitment and determination.

And I very much look forward to hearing how several regions in the European Union are rising to meet this major challenge.

A vibrant health sector contributes towards boosting job creation; reducing poverty and inequalities; and strengthening social cohesion.

The European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing reflects a growing awareness that better care and sustainability of health services calls for innovative ways to address the needs of the elderly.

The Partnership has encouraged a wide range of stakeholders to join forces, to improve cooperation, and to foster political commitment, so as to nurture innovative solutions towards a better quality of life as citizens grow older.

Two years since it was launched, the Partnership, is helping to identify and develop new approaches for supporting change.

I share the vision of the EIP Partners that patients must be placed at the very centre of healthcare and social care systems.

A vision where the focus moves away from hospital-centred, reactive, disease-focused care, towards a proactive, community-based model of prevention and continuous disease management, with the participation of the patient.

One inspiring example is Scotland's Telecare Development Programme which aims to help more people live at home for longer, by promoting the use of telecare, and embedding it as an integral part of community based services.

I believe that the Partnership – through the enthusiasm, motivation and commitment of partners – has created a critical mass that can trigger the necessary shift in the perception of ageing away from "cost" and towards "opportunity".

Let me now turn to what the Partnership has achieved so far.

More than 300 good practices have been identified which make a real difference in preventing or delaying the deterioration of health of older people, and towards improving their quality of life.

It is important that such good practices inspire policy makers across Europe to develop new approaches. Good practices in one part of Europe can be replicated and adapted to the regional context of other parts of Europe.

Indeed, the wealth of evidence that you, as partners, have brought to the table provides a sound basis on how innovations in health can be used in new approaches of prevention and care for older people, and how these can be implemented in daily life.

Perhaps the Partnership's biggest impact stems from leading by example.

The Reference Sites serve as excellent examples of how to share information and solutions; on how to overcome barriers and bottlenecks; and on how to inspire decision makers.

They provide evidence for the potential “replicability” and scaling-up of successful practices, which I have just mentioned. And together, the Reference Sites also act as a process of collective learning.

At local level, the European Innovation Partnership model has inspired a number of regions to create their own cross-sector models of collaboration to foster “grass-roots-upwards” innovations.

Partners have forged successful coalitions to work on the replication of their practices in new regions, in new areas.

Two examples of this are the Celtic Innovation Partnership and the Slimmer Leven 2020 Innovation network for Active and Healthy Ageing in Noord Brabant.

Reference Sites have also successfully mobilised support to health investments. Examples include Campania, Bari, the Catalan Region or Scotland.

The actions of EIP partners constitute an important element of Europe 2020 – the European growth strategy – and show how investing in health can bring value for money and open up new opportunities for businesses and for employment.

Take for instance the cluster for early diagnosis and management of cognitive ageing, dementia and vision impairment in Coimbra, Portugal, which created 100 jobs.

Our action should, however, not stop here.

Now is the time to move up a gear.

Now is the time to actively share and spread those good practices we have identified throughout the European Union.

This calls for a holistic approach. We need to identify synergies across initiatives that will help catalyse the changes we wish to encourage.

And of course, we need to work effectively together to achieve this and to optimise our collective efforts. Good practices that are currently on-going in relative isolation need to gain wider attention and be scaled-up.

In other words, good practices need to become mainstream practices. Greater visibility will help to inspire others to follow in a similar vein.

The mobilisation of partners and strengthening of political commitment will be crucial in the year that lies ahead.

I can assure you of the Commission's strong commitment in this regard.

Commitment is not enough, one also needs money.

And this is why the Commission has ensured that several EU funding instruments – including Horizon 2020, the Ambient Assisted Living programme, the Health Programme and the European Structural and Investment Funds - can contribute to this Partnership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Partnership has come a mighty long way over the past 2 years.

Now is the time to showcase our achievements so that fringe activities become mainstream activities, to the benefit of citizens and societies right across the European Union.

Thank you.