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## Access to healthcare: Breaking down barriers

📅 2017-05-09 👤 Sara Gayarre 👁 626 Views 💬 0 Comment

🏷 Access to Healthcare, Empowerment, European Patients Forum, Universal Health Coverage

**In a nutshell:** EU patients still report barriers to access to healthcare. To overturn this situation, EPF runs a campaign and calls for Universal Health Coverage. The campaign focuses on five areas of action.

Access to healthcare is a long-standing policy priority for the European Patients' Forum (EPF) and its membership, and is at the heart of the vision of the organisation. Based on the work done in previous years, EPF started a patient-led [campaign on Access to Healthcare](#). The campaign has been running online since January 2017, and was officially launched on 27 February 2017, at the European Parliament in Brussels.

### Five Areas of Action

Patients across the EU are reporting multiple barriers to access to healthcare, whether it's not available, not adapted to needs, or not affordable. To this aim, the campaign has been built around [five areas of action](#) where progress and improvements are still needed in order to guarantee Universal Health Coverage. EPF will advocate for each of these areas all throughout the year, and will count on the help of five high-level champions to do so at political level.

#### 1. Providing Quality of Care across the EU



organisations.

From the patients' perspective, access and quality are interlinked. EPF will advocate for standards of quality of care to be defined with the patients, and to respond to the needs of individual patients rather than adopting a "one size fits all approach". MEP Paul Rübig (EPP, Austria) champions this area. He will call on Member States to put in place a process of health system performance assessment that responds to the principles of good governance, transparency and democracy by including perspective of health stakeholders, including patient



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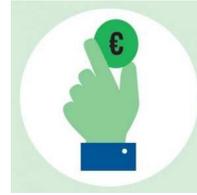
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## 2. Committing to Sustainable Investment in Health

Insufficient or inadequate investment in health is an important issue in many EU countries. It impacts negatively on patients' access to healthcare services. It often translates in health inequalities and poorer health outcomes for the population, which is costly and detrimental for the labour force in Member States. EPF, together with champion MEP Sirpa Pietikainen (EPP, Finland), will call for Member States to commit to invest sustainably in healthcare and reflect on key mechanisms ensuring investment in healthcare are based on outcomes and added value. EPF believes that health promotion, prevention and patient-centred chronic disease management are key areas to improve sustainability.



## 3. Encouraging Affordability of Healthcare Products and Services

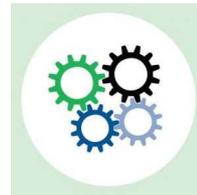


Patients keep reporting barriers when accessing healthcare: when available, it can be unaffordable and cause financial hardship. Increasing co-payment, the cost of specialist care, the price of innovative medicines and devices, the price of diagnostics, and other non-reimbursed costs are all contributing factors. Patients are faced with opacity when it comes to pricing and reimbursement decisions. They are not involved in decision making, which leads to discrepancies between what they need and what is reimbursed. MEP Andrey Kovatchev (EPP, Bulgaria)

is championing this area. He will encourage Member States to improve the affordability of healthcare products and services. The aim is to make healthcare affordable for all, and not only to these patients who can pay.

## 4. Implementing Access to a Holistic Range of Health and Social Services

To address chronic conditions and multi-morbidity, patients need to have access to integrated care services. "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease" according to the WHO. In this context, MEP Katerina Konecna (GUE/NGL, Czech Republic) will work with EPF to erase silos and implement a holistic approach encompassing affordable access to physical and mental health services, as well as appropriate support from social services.



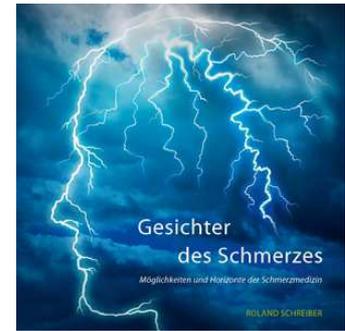
## 5. Ending Discrimination and Stigma Patients Are Facing in Healthcare



Healthcare must be accessible and appropriate to the needs of all patients, otherwise access to healthcare is not universal. EPF will work collaboratively with champion MEP Miriam Dalli (S&D, Malta) and other NGOs to ensure the EU approach to universal health coverage is inclusive and addresses the access barriers that vulnerable groups are currently facing.

### Universal Health Coverage for All, by 2030

EPF, together with its members and other campaign's partners, will work on the production of a policy document including concrete recommendations in each specific area that will help to achieve Universal Health Coverage. EPF will support Member States in delivering on their commitment to meet this goal. Under the tagline "Universal Health Coverage For All", the campaign aims to raise awareness about the barriers patients face in accessing healthcare, and to build on current political momentum – including the UN SDG for health – to foster more EU cooperation on access to healthcare.



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## Why a campaign on Access to Healthcare?



Disparities in access to healthcare have always existed, but the financial crisis in Europe and the austerity measures that followed resulted in a fall of healthcare spending in many Member States. Cuts in healthcare budgets and in insurance coverage increased fees and co-payments. Cuts in social protection measures have made inequalities worse.

At the same time, healthcare systems are facing increasing demands as a result of demographic change. As the population ages, the number of patients with chronic diseases is growing. Meanwhile patients diagnosed with chronic conditions at an earlier stage are living longer thanks to the progress of medical treatments.

This background brings us to the current situation where patients across the EU are reporting multiple barriers to access to healthcare. EU countries should therefore overturn the current trends of short-sighted decisions on investment in healthcare, and work to improve access to healthcare by taking concrete steps. EU Member States have committed to achieve [universal health coverage](#) by 2030 – as stated by the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). The EPF campaign will advocate for this objective to be a reality, supporting Member States in reaching this goal.



The EPF campaign will contribute to make **universal access a reality for EU patients by 2030**, through defining and promoting concrete actions, in concert with the health community, to which decision makers need to commit, to ensure we achieve the Health SDGs by 2030.

— EPF Working Group on Access

## A patient-led campaign, where everyone can contribute!

The campaign needs everyone's support: individual patients, their families, carers, researchers, health professionals, regulators, the healthcare industry, insurers and anyone else who is interested in a better EU health system.

Supporters can show their engagement by signing the [online petition](#). It urges the EU and national policy makers to drive action to achieve Universal Health Coverage for All. Supporters can also contribute to the campaign by communicating the key messages and goals while adopting their own approach. The engagement [toolkit](#) has been created with the aim of offering ideas and core material easy to use by anyone interested in getting involved.

We can make Universal Health Coverage for All a reality by 2030 if we work together!

#Access2030



## Tell us your thoughts! Let's discuss!

Source: [Access to healthcare: breaking down barriers](#)

– What is the biggest challenge in your country regarding access to healthcare?




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**Access to healthcare: Breaking down barriers**  
 EPF has launched a campaign on Universal Health Coverage. The campaign focuses around five political areas for action. It urges member states to work together. More in the Careum blog: <http://blog.careum.ch/universal-health-coverage/>

**5 Steps to Universal Health...**  
 Patients across the EU are still reporting...

- Did you encounter problems accessing healthcare?
- Which of the five policy areas does affect you the most?
- How do you think you can engage in the campaign?



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**Sara Gayarre**

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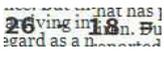
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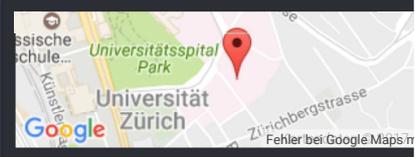
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