

# Health: The priorities of the European Commission

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## The priorities of Vytenis Andriukaitis, the current European Commissioner for Health & Food Safety are explained here

Vytenis Andriukaitis is the current European Commissioner for Health & Food Safety and his responsibilities cover national health systems and food safety. On the former, his responsibilities include helping to deal with the challenge of increased calls on national health services during intense pressure on public finances.

He is also responsible for building up knowledge on how national health systems to shape national and [European Union \(EU\) policies](#) are performing. Here, we'll focus on these public health aspects of his remit, including big data, [tackling antimicrobial resistance and support science and innovation](#).

## Health promotion, education and disease prevention

On public health, one striking development took place on 19th February, when Commissioners Andriukaitis and Crețu brought together health professionals to kick-start the reflection on future EU investments in health that fall under the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy programmes. The roundtable discussion on that day concluded that health systems are moving towards more health promotion, education and disease prevention. There is a shift away from hospital and institution-centred care to community-based care and a move to the integration of health and social care.

In this vein, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Vytenis Andriukaitis, shares his thoughts: "According to the most recent Eurobarometer survey, almost 70% of Europeans want the EU to do more in the area of health. Acting via Cohesion Policy funds offers us the possibility to make a difference on the ground where it is needed and show that the demands expressed by fellow Europeans are not left unheard. I am also

delighted that health becomes a new category for the RegioStars. This is yet another demonstration that we must and can implement the principle Health in All Policies as set out in the Treaty.” (1)

## Tackling antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

In late 2017, Commissioner Andriukaitis outlined the EU’s ‘One Health’ approach to tackling [antimicrobial resistance](#) and it is here that he points out the misuse of antibiotics in people leads to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) – a growing challenge which at the time of writing was responsible for 25,000 deaths in the EU every year. To deal with this, we find out that the EU pushed forward a ‘one health’ approach to deal with AMR, “taking concrete actions in human and veterinary medicines simultaneously”, as the Commissioner puts it. Cooperation and coordination are crucial aspects for this policy to work, so that together with international bodies such as the WHO, OIE and FAO, progress can be made in tackling AMR with, “a one planet, one voice and one health approach.”

In more recent news, we learn about the “Strategic Approach to Pharmaceuticals in the Environment” presented on 11th March, which identifies six action areas on all stages of the pharmaceutical life cycle, in an effort to seek improvements. Commissioner Andriukaitis’s comments on this which draw our attention to the issue of AMR.

“It is essential that medicines are safe and effective for our health, however we should be aware of the environmental impact they may have. Drug-resistant bacteria is one of the major health threats world-wide, therefore in our fight against antimicrobial resistance, everyone benefits not only from the prudent use of medicines but also from a well thought-through production and disposing system.

“It is time for us collectively to draw attention to the risks of the antimicrobials for the environment. This Communication identifies areas where action is needed and serves us as a stepping stone for our future discussions.” (2)

## Big data

In the April 2019 edition of Open Access Government, we uncovered one prominent theme of Commissioner Andriukaitis that concerns big data. In his view, big data, “has the potential to unlock important [new prevention, diagnostic and therapeutic avenues](#)”. While innovation is now linked even more with the use of big data, challenges in this area remain, Commissioner Andriukaitis believes. Commissioner Andriukaitis also explains his increasing acceptance of big data, a fascinating point he details in his own words:

“Whether it be pools of sequenced genomes, or real-world environmental and lifestyle data, it is clear that access to larger samples will facilitate more effective, deeper, more targeted research.

“The need to share relevant data more broadly led to the launch of the European Open Science Cloud. This pilot project is funded by Horizon 2020 and is a big data demonstrator scheme. It includes pan-cancer analyses to identify common mutation patterns for better care.”

## Transparency to support science and innovation

Finally, let’s look at one aspect of the Commissioner’s remit that concerns the importance of transparency when it comes to [science and innovation related to public health](#). One point Commissioner Andriukaitis underlines is that there is delicate balance to be struck to ensure research and development is incentivised

while ensuring that innovation is meaningful to patients remains affordable so that the whole of society can access it of society.

In his late 2018 speech, the Commissioner explains his thought on this in more detail:

“Bringing more transparency on the full cost of Research & Development would help guide the current debate on how improvements can be found in the current R&D model. Increasing transparency is an important part of the EU’s new Clinical Trials Regulation, which is expected to apply from 2020.”

Having said that, Commissioner Andriukaitis said that this is not enough and here, therefore, urged:

“A fluid and continuous exchange of information between payers and the industry is essential throughout the R&D phase as well as the subsequent processes of authorisation and health technology assessment.” (3)

One area that the European Commission has been supporting concerns brain research, which they have supported over the years through their Framework programmes. Through these investments, at a better understanding of brain function and dysfunction, developing methods for diagnosis and monitoring, prevention, treatment as well as care and support is the intended aim.

One project the European Commission supports is the Human Brain Project (HBP), that sets out to give a cutting-edge, ICT-based scientific Research Infrastructure for brain research, brain-inspired computing and cognitive neuroscience. In addition, the Commission also fosters encourages cooperation among EU Member States through the EU Joint Programme – Neurodegenerative Disease Research (JPND), the largest global research initiative that tackles neurodegenerative diseases. (4)

## References

- (1) [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-19-1173\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-1173_en.htm)
- (2) [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-19-1597\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-1597_en.htm)
- (3) [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/andriukaitis/announcements/transparency-support-science-and-innovation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/andriukaitis/announcements/transparency-support-science-and-innovation_en)
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