

NEW FACE OF HEALTH



Guidelines
for the future

**health
comm**

FORUM 2025

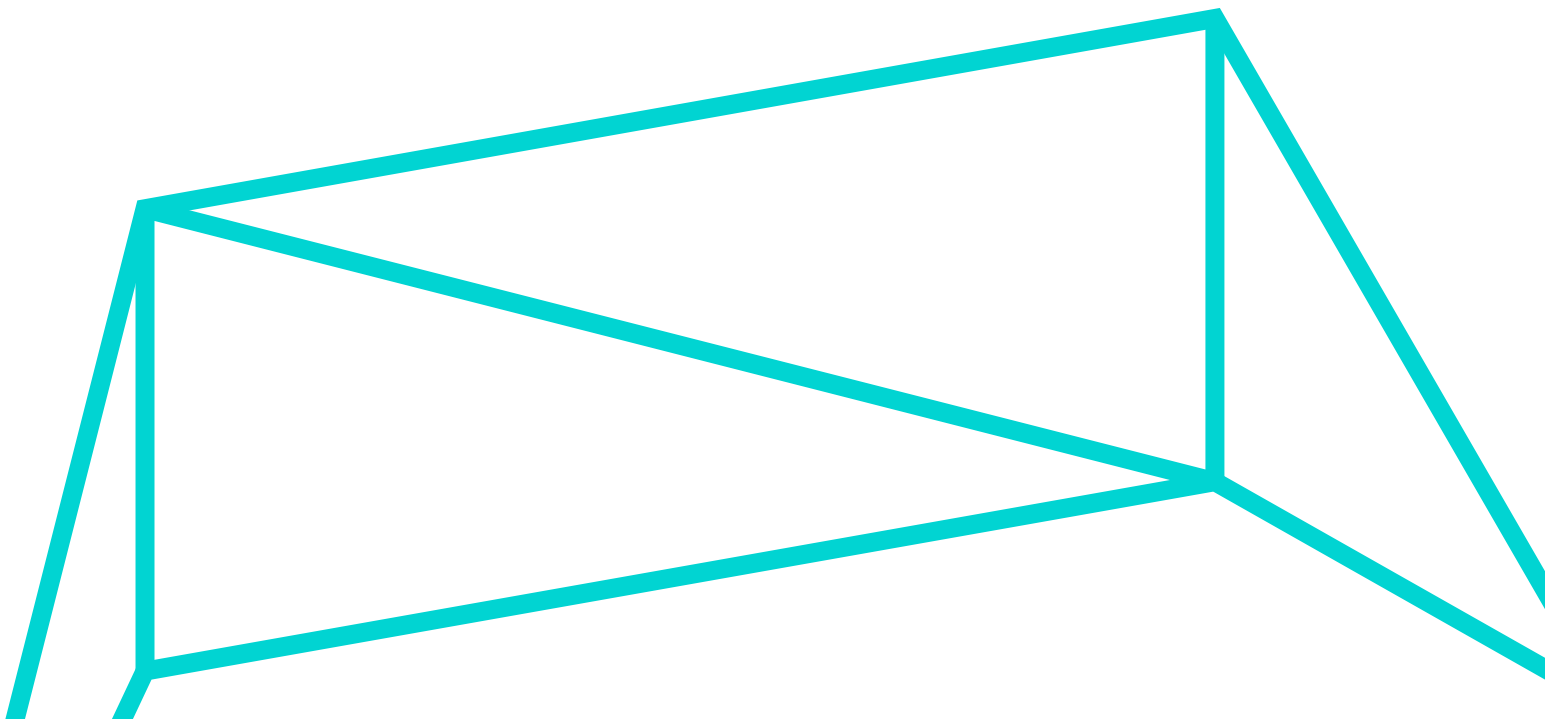
In Croatia, health is increasingly perceived as the sole responsibility of the individual, yet data and reality show that it is a **key factor in social stability and economic resilience**. At the same time, the healthcare system faces demographic aging, declining fertility, the emigration of the working-age population, and a growing prevalence of chronic diseases.

Croatia allocates around 7.0% of GDP annually to healthcare, while the EU average is nearly 11%. Life expectancy in Croatia is 77 years—five years less than the EU average (82)—while healthy life years amount to 66.8. Although Croatia performs well in some indicators, such as the number of healthy years, an average of almost 12 years of life are lost to illness. **This has serious consequences for productivity, public finances, and quality of life.**

Meanwhile, **prevention remains insufficiently embedded in everyday practice**. Vaccination rates against diseases such as measles and COVID-19 are falling, childhood obesity is among the highest in the EU, and chronic diseases increasingly affect younger age groups. At the same time, citizens' trust is eroded by fragmented services, a sense of inequality, and growing reliance on the private sector.

Digital tools and health data are still not sufficiently integrated into the system. Electronic medical records exist but remain closed systems, lacking interoperability and analytics that would enable personalized and predictive care.

The third **HealthComm Forum 2025**, organized by **Val Group** under **the patronage of the European Parliament and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia**, brought together leading figures from science, healthcare institutions, industry, civil society, and government around a common goal: building a health system that responds to citizens' real needs, supports the economy, and enables more healthy years of life. The system must move from treating disease to preserving health, strengthen prevention and cross-sector cooperation, and ensure more healthy years for all citizens.



Despite different roles and perspectives, common guidelines emerged from all panels and discussions, outlining the steps that should be taken—planned, systematic, and continuous—to achieve this goal:

1 ADOPTION OF A NEW STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK – FROM A DISEASE SYSTEM TO A HEALTH SYSTEM

Health policy must focus on preserving health, not just treating disease. **National priorities and success measures need to be redefined, emphasizing prevention, healthy life years, and active aging.** This also requires recognizing citizens' health as a fundamental goal across all public policies—from education and nutrition to urban planning and fiscal policy.

2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES” APPROACH

A **multisectoral approach to health must be institutionalized** at all levels of public administration and through legislative initiatives—including education, finance, environment, and employment—so that health becomes a criterion in all public decisions.

3 STRONG PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

Family medicine must become the foundation of coordinated and continuous care. Key steps include **reducing administrative burdens on doctors, enabling teamwork in primary care (including psychologists, nutritionists, physiotherapists), and supporting a proactive approach to citizens' health.** Pilot projects of community-based teams have shown potential, but now need scaling up and stable funding.

4 HEALTH DATA AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE

Health data represent untapped potential to transform the system from reactive to predictive. A **clear national digital health strategy is needed, including standardization, interoperability, privacy protection, and development of analytical capacity.** Artificial intelligence and big data can enable personalized prevention and early intervention—but only if citizens and healthcare professionals trust the system.

5

CONTINUITY OF CARE: THE PATIENT'S HEALTH JOURNEY – FROM DIAGNOSIS TO LIFE

People living with a diagnosis must not be left on their own. **The system must ensure continuity of information, emotional and social support, and clear navigation points throughout treatment.** This requires building functional patient navigation mechanisms, strengthening the role of patient associations, and formally recognizing the role of peer guides and health assistants.

6

OPEN PARTNERSHIP FOR INNOVATION

A sustainable health system requires cooperation between the public and private sectors, science, industry, and society. **The system must open to innovation, accelerate the evaluation and introduction of new technologies (including digital therapies, decision-support systems, self-care platforms), and ensure regulatory clarity and stability.** Collaboration must be based on transparent rules and shared goals.

7

EQUAL AND TIMELY ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Pharmaceutical policy must ensure that all citizens, regardless of country or market size, have timely access to safe and effective medicines. **European mechanisms that promote transparent procurement, faster entry of innovations to the market, and stability of the generic segment (which safeguards system sustainability) must be implemented.**

8

MEASURING OUTCOMES

It is time to redefine indicators and success criteria. Instead of focusing on the number of consultations, hospitalizations, or spending per patient, **the system must begin measuring outcomes, both qualitative and quantitative.** Indicators such as healthy life years, patient quality of life, user experience, and prevention effectiveness are crucial for strategic management.