

The Future of Pandemic Preparedness

Report



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[The British Chamber of Commerce | EU & Belgium](#) hosted a panel discussion on 14 March 2024 on the future of pandemic preparedness; the pressing challenges, strategies and innovations needed to fortify global health resilience. The discussion with Wolfgang Philipp, Principle Adviser to HERA, Gloria Ghéquièrre, Policy officer, Cabinet of Belgian Health Minister Frank Vandenbroucke and Morwenna Carrington, Deputy Director, UK Health Security highlighted the importance of:

1. Political Will

Keeping political focus to ensure the lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic are heeded. The current Belgian Presidency of the EU has prioritized crisis preparedness and enhancing research, development and innovation so that Europe is a front-runner in finding commercial solutions to emerging health threats. However it remains challenging as health concerns are often overlooked given the competing political priorities.

2. Funding

Ensuring adequate resource and funding from governments is challenging and so prevention strategies must demonstrate how effective they are in leveraging financial investments, The recent EUR 1 billion cut to EU4Health will substantially impact on HERA's activities, as 30% of its funding comes from EU4Health. Whilst National preparedness plans were acknowledged as essential blueprints to outline common competencies, concerns were raised regarding limitations due to continued insufficient budget allocation.

3. International co-operation and data sharing

The EU, its member states, as well as the UK are committed to working collaboratively with international partners on pandemic prevention. Pandemic preparedness and encouraging research into global biomedical threats is a priority at the G7 and G20. However, the current Pandemic Treaty negotiations have been stalling; ensuring trust and collaboration with countries of the Global South is essential to enable search and development efforts targeting priority pathogens lacking vaccines and to prevent a future pandemic. The significance of data sharing was underlined. HERA's recently launched global wastewater surveillance network and the UK's efforts to identify vaccine-derived poliovirus demonstrate progress being made.

4. Joined-up government and a holistic approach

A joined-up approach across government is needed; given the complexity the risk is an over-bureaucratic approach which frustrates effective decision-making. Although challenging, One Health Approach needs to be implemented to tackle the climate and health issues, particularly with arbo- and vector borne diseases such as Zika, dengue and Chikungunya now on Europe's shores. Moreover, there is a recognition of the importance of transitioning from disease-specific plans to comprehensive strategies covering all forms of transmission and strengthening capabilities.

5. Robust testing and surveillance mechanisms

Swift activation and deactivation of measures, with a focus on ensuring flexibility and responsiveness is vital.

6. Transparent and constructive interaction with industry

Particularly in relation to stockpiling for equal access, addressing challenges posed by CBRN, respiratory diseases, and AMR. The fragility of supply chains has been particularly evident during recent outbreaks of diseases such as smallpox and Streptococcus, and so establishing dialogue and innovative funding mechanisms is essential. The EU Critical Medicines Alliance has been established to improve collaboration with industry and all stakeholders. Improving the co-ordination of clinical trials is also vital to attract companies to invest in Europe.

7. Co-ordination between Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) and addressing misinformation

This is being driven forward at the WHO level; consideration could be given to an EU Chief Medical Officer to co-ordinate communication in a public health crisis.