

Position paper on behalf of the Cross-border Institute of Healthcare Systems and Prevention (CBI) & the Ems Dollart Region (EDR)

In the European history, the European Union has brought unprecedented benefits to its citizens by facilitating the freedom of movement for persons, services and goods. However, not all European citizens experience the advantages of the EU equally. Particularly in border regions, in which around 30% of the EU population resides, citizens still perceive a discrepancy between the European idea and its realization. On the one hand, crossing the border is more natural in these regions, on the other hand, border regions are often less economically and socially developed. Cross-border collaboration that has a direct benefit for citizens would give a new impetus to the idea of European unification. Collaboration in the field of healthcare is particularly promising.

The recent corona crisis showed how borders in Europe suddenly became real again and how much political actions on each side of the border differ. At the same time, the strength of European solidarity has been evident, by e.g. transferring patients to intensive care units in regions with more capacities. Certainly, it became evident that containing the spread of the coronavirus and taking care of severely ill covid-19 patients requires cross-border collaboration. This can ensure more efficient use of public and private resources and can be of immediate benefit for citizens.

For more than 40 years, the Ems Dollart Region (EDR) has been committed to collaboration between citizens, companies, authorities and organizations throughout the northern Dutch-German border region. Despite many efforts, cross-border healthcare activities and structures are still unusual in most border regions including the northern Dutch-German border region. The population is characterized by a rather low socioeconomic status which goes along with numerous health-related problems.

Therefore, the School of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Oldenburg (DE) together with the Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health in Groningen (NL) - collaboration between the University of Groningen, the University Medical Center Groningen and the Hanze University of Applied Sciences - joined efforts to create the Cross-border Institute of Healthcare Systems and Prevention (CBI), a knowledge institute which started its activities in February 2019. The CBI and the EDR are committed to tackle cross-border health challenges to offer citizens in our region high-quality healthcare. It is crucial for us to identify the best preventive-driven health incentives and to find evidence-based solutions. This can be done by comparing the Dutch and German health(care) systems. Moreover, we will analyze which strategies succeed and we will develop evidence-based concepts for major future healthcare challenges. To achieve this goal, we need the participation and commitment of different stakeholder groups. Thus, we are inviting health insurance companies in the region, health policy makers as well as health authorities in the Dutch provinces of Groningen, Drenthe, Friesland and in the Weser-Ems region in Germany to join and support the CBI and EDR effort.

For citizens in the border region high quality healthcare is essential. Collaboration among healthcare organizations and healthcare providers in both countries is needed to secure this in the future. With this approach the CBI contributes to the aim of the Ems Dollart Region and its members to promote collaboration throughout the region so that citizens can take full advantage of the opportunities offered by both countries. By ensuring that citizens in border regions can utilize high-quality and affordable healthcare - also on the other side of the border - the viability of the region, access to healthcare and thereby high quality of life for citizens is assured. Cross-border collaboration is a challenge, particularly for health insurance companies on both sides of the border, but it will in the long run probably lead to financial benefits.

Cross-border cooperation in healthcare has never been so important and needed as now! Our aim is to make the region more resilient to crisis situations and to prepare them for the changes that come along with globalization, digitization and the demographic change. The EDR and the CBI want to actively provide an impetus for achieving this goal. We are counting on support from the region!



“No borders in health”

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