

EHFG 2020 MAIN THEME

Dancing with elephants

New partnerships for health, democracy, business

The determinants of health and well-being are often driven by the narrow interests of big players, and just like elephants, the issues and stakeholders concerned can be unpredictable and dangerous. In order to carefully engage with these giants and safeguard the interests of people and patients, we need to conceptualise potentially difficult new partnership models – ‘dancing with elephants’ – but we should be careful not to get our toes crushed.

Critical questions are necessary: how can we rebalance shifts in decision-making power and momentum for innovation away from small politico-economic circles? Can we learn from disruptive business models and social entrepreneurship? Should all stakeholders sit at the table across divides in political ideologies, interests and values, or is there a line to be drawn in who we are willing to partner with and when? One could even provocatively question whether our current democratic systems, which encourage action around four-year electoral cycles, are fit to act effectively on complex long-term challenges such as NCDs or the climate crisis.

Many of the ‘elephants’ sit at a complicated nexus of economic, political and social agendas, such as balancing the influence of powerful commercial operators and lobbies against public health interests; tackling the devastating ecological and social effects of the climate crisis; preventing healthcare fraud and corruption; halting the advance of antimicrobial resistance; harnessing the disruptive effects of digitalisation; addressing high-priced medicines while championing needs-driven innovation; and understanding the forces behind the recent surge of populism and their effects on health policy.

Addressing political and commercial determinants of health in tandem is crucial in this context, and will necessitate political will to regulate, form intersectoral partnerships, and adopt a whole of society approach. To effect systemic change that deals with the root causes of wicked problems and to create the transformation we want to see, we need the right partners and the right rhythm – and we have to be accommodating of each other’s strengths and limitations.

With the Conference on the Future of Europe convening from 2020-2022 to reconsider the future of European democracy, the time is ripe to determine what role health and well-being must play in this vision. Only by confronting heavy, uncomfortable and controversial topics can we move forward on democratising health and well-being, and reach SDG3 for all.

Join us for the EHFG 2020 and help us reconceptualise ideas and approaches that are standing in the way of progress. Let’s learn a new dance!

SAVE THE DATE • #EHFG2020 • 30 SEPTEMBER – 2 OCTOBER 2020