

## TO-REACH – COVID-19 Statement

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The COVID-19 pandemic is having an enormous impact on our health systems, and most of them are responding with speed and innovation. This crisis is putting an unprecedented level of pressure on all components of our systems, with new and evolving thinking on how to efficiently and effectively address the various challenges it creates for decision-makers, planners, those working at the frontline of service delivery and the wider population. Health systems are introducing **radical changes** in terms of emergency protocols, public health measures integrated with the reorganisation of hospital care, responding to the pressures placed on critical care in particular, innovative digital solutions, shortages of medical and protective equipment and infrastructure, and redeploying health care workers, while ensuring that the most vulnerable in the population and those providing essential services are being cared for. The pandemic is **strongly impacting on health research**, too, reprioritising and revising ongoing work to support health system efforts to tackle the crisis, extraordinary levels of data exchange, collaboration between sectors, analysis and a shared need for new evidence. Connection between action and research has never been so necessary even in domains as health policy and health services research.

This emergency clearly demonstrates once again the **complexity and interconnectedness of our health and social care systems**, and the complexity of introducing and managing change in a rapidly evolving environment. **Novel diagnostic, containment and mitigation policies** are essential to reduce the demand for critical services and ensure timely treatment. But as **affordability is a clear prerequisite to access diagnostics and treatment, service and policy innovation is as crucial to effectively address health system capacity issues and overcome structural barriers**. The [TO-REACH Strategic Research Agenda](#) has identified a number of **key areas** that are at the forefront of the pandemic crisis that our health systems are currently facing and that they might need to confront again in the future. These includes sustainable health service redesign and workforce planning, information technology and data exchange for health improvement, governance and health financing, collaboration, cross-country information exchange and research. These are at the very heart of the international debate on our health systems and services.

Health systems are learning from each other in real time with COVID-19, although with great uncertainty about what experiences elsewhere can teach us about our own systems and what we should do. This illustrates anew the need for enhanced **solidarity and exchange of knowledge** on our health and care systems and on how we should **support the effective transfer and implementation of innovative services and policies** within a sustainable **framework for cooperation in Europe**. **Improved and shared understanding of the different contexts and their impacts on system performance and structures is vital**.

Within this context the TO-REACH consortium, whilst supporting EU's coordination efforts in response to the crisis, upholds the need for even **stronger cooperation and exchange of knowledge and evidence**, highlighting its crucial importance in **improving and strengthening our health and care systems and services**; today in the face of this unprecedented crisis and in the aftermath, when we will need to ensure **sustainability and quality of care** for all.

*The TO-REACH Consortium*

