

1. GREECE NEEDS A NATIONAL HEALTH STRATEGY

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Greece needs a national health strategy

COMMENTARY
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The time has come for the Greek government to develop a national health strategy. In fact, it's long overdue.

Once hailed as one of Greece's greatest achievements, the National Health System (ESY) has been largely neglected by successive governments since its establishment 50 years ago. And the financial crisis of 2010 dealt it an almost mortal blow. That's a pity, because Greece has the potential to be a regional leader in health, wellness and the life sciences. But those ambitions will remain stymied until the country develops a national health strategy with a sound, sustainable and functional National Health System at its core.

The government has promised to develop such a strategy; it's time to

deliver. Since the crisis, our healthcare system has been left to struggle in crisis mode. In 2009, public spending on healthcare was about 5 billion euros, which decreased during the crisis to approximately half that amount. In spite of the economy returning to growth, healthcare spending by the state has continued to fluctuate for the last several years around €2.5 billion annually, including on both outpatients and hospitals.

But it's not just about money, it's also about efficiency and effectiveness. Policy decisions – even those without budget implications, like clinical trial guidelines – are taken very slowly. The digitization of the health system lags behind. There is chronic understaffing in hospitals. There is a dearth of transparency and predictability in pharmaceutical policy.

Meanwhile, the opaque, crisis-era

drug rebate system – known as clawback – is hindering the market entry of new treatments and innovative products. All this has dire implications for an aging population with a rising incidence of chronic disease.

It doesn't have to be this way. Despite the cutbacks, the pharmaceutical industry has been thriving and a significant amount is being put into research and innovation. A national health strategy, which will be a central subject at the 7th InvestGR Forum in July, is critical for both the health of the Greek public and the health of the Greek economy. The time has come for industry representatives and policy makers to formulate sustainable solutions.

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