

Promoting Child Health Through Research and Innovation

A Key Priority for Europe

July 2026



Healthy ageing starts in childhood. Stronger investment in child health research will **improve lifelong health**, **strengthen Europe's economy** and **drive innovation**.

Policymakers must take **decisive action** to position research on child health as a **central and indispensable pillar** of the EU innovation strategy.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 80 million children and adolescents live in Europe, and

9 in 10 deaths

are linked to non-communicable diseases.

Many of these chronic conditions have origins in early life.

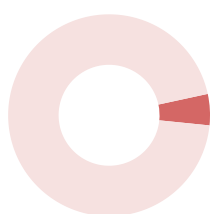


? Why it Matters

Children are 20% of Europe's population and 100% of Europe's future. The foundations for lifelong health are established during pregnancy, childhood and adolescence. Many of the major diseases that affect adults begin early in life. Investing in child health research helps prevent disease, improves quality of life and supports healthy ageing.

↔ The Funding Gap

Child health remains under-represented in European research funding. Despite the importance of early life health, children receive limited visibility in current EU health research programmes. Out of 38 Horizon Europe Health calls for 2026 to 2027, children are mentioned in only 2.



EUROPE
Only 5% of funding opportunities in Europe specifically mention children.



UNITED STATES
In contrast, 13% of the US National Institutes of Health budget is allocated to paediatric research.

👤 Investing Early Delivers the Greatest Return

Early intervention generates the highest social and economic benefits. Evidence shows that investment in childhood delivers greater returns than investment later in life. Better child health leads to healthier adults, a stronger workforce and lower long term healthcare costs.



Stronger economic growth



Healthier lives



Higher productivity



Reduced disease burden



Sustainable healthcare systems

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Europe's Opportunity

Europe is well placed to become a global leader in child health innovation. Europe combines world class research, strong clinical networks and leading biotechnology expertise. With greater strategic support, it can accelerate breakthroughs that benefit both children and wider society.

Advantages in Europe

- Strong academic excellence
- Pan-European research networks
- Expertise in rare diseases
- Advanced biotechnology ecosystem
- Opportunities for public-private collaboration



How Policymakers Can Change the Future

- 1 PRIORITISE CHILD HEALTH IN EU RESEARCH FUNDING**
Ensure funding reflects the importance of children to Europe's future.
- 2 ADOPT A LIFE COURSE APPROACH**
Recognise that healthy ageing begins in childhood.
- 3 ALIGN WITH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS COMMITMENTS**
Support equitable inclusion of children in research.
- 4 STRENGTHEN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**
Include paediatric experts, families and industry in research planning.
- 5 MAKE CHILD INCLUSION STANDARD PRACTICE**
Include children and adolescents in health research whenever appropriate.

Child health research is not a specialised issue.
It is a strategic investment in Europe's future health,
innovation, competitiveness and economic prosperity.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

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