



Covid-blues or systemic time bomb?

European trust in conventional healthcare is on the decline

- Satisfaction with healthcare systems plunges from 71 to 64 percent
- Slight decrease in trust in conventional medicine
- General practitioners deemed most trustworthy medical professionals
- Pharmacy of the future must combine individual care with comforts of digitisation

The 2021 edition of the STADA Health Report clearly illustrated that the European population were willing to be indulgent in times of torment; over the past year however, their satisfaction has taken quite the tumble: today, only 64 percent are content with the healthcare system in their country – an overall decline by seven percentage points compared to 2021.

In part, this can be attributed to low scores in Kazakhstan (25 percent) and Romania (31 percent) who were not involved in the 2021 survey – still, long-standing participants Serbia (31 percent) and Poland (36 percent) are also towards the bottom of the satisfaction scale. In fact, Serbia recorded the most significant drop in approval: 49 percent of its citizens gave the Serbian healthcare system the thumbs up in 2021, which today remains true for 31 percent. Other notable mentions include the UK (16 percent drop), Austria (13 percent fall), France, Portugal and the Czech Republic (9 percent decline each). On the other end of the spectrum, contentment is at its highest in Belgium (86 percent), Switzerland (84 percent) and the Netherlands (83 percent). Interestingly, the Netherlands is also the only country where satisfaction with the national healthcare system has increased over the last year.

Population beats politicians on handling Covid

So as satisfaction with healthcare systems fell almost across the board during year two of the pandemic, where did the public place the blame? Healthcare systems and professionals? Their governments? Themselves? Despite

an overall decline in general satisfaction, healthcare systems still come out on top: across the continent, 60 percent say they are at least satisfied with their Covid-related performance. Switzerland (80 percent) and the Netherlands (77 percent) are particularly content, and Belgium, Portugal and the UK also scored an above average approval rate of 71 percent each.

Number two on the podium goes to the people themselves, albeit somewhat less distinctively. Just over one in two Europeans (52 percent) believe that they themselves, along with their fellow citizens, have handled the crisis well. But the proportion of people in Serbia who share this opinion (26 percent) is merely half of the European average, followed by their Romanian neighbours (33 percent). Out of all age groups surveyed, Europeans between the ages of 18 and 24 were most likely to agree with this assessment, as they were least satisfied with the performance of the general public in their respective countries (43 percent). The UK (66 percent), Switzerland (65 percent) and Portugal (61 percent) on the other hand give themselves more credit for sticking it out during Covid.



Last and definitely least – European governments. Across the continent, only 42 percent of Europeans would congratulate their administration on a job well done. Poland (28 percent) and Romania (30 percent) are even less likely to applaud. In comparison, Switzerland (70 percent) and Portugal (66 percent) give top marks to their politicians.

2021**71 %**

were satisfied with
their healthcare system.

2022**64 %**

are satisfied with
their healthcare system.

Despite low approval rates for overall government performance, one of the security measures implemented to prevent the virus from spreading further has actually increased in popularity over the last 12 months: while in 2021, only 22 percent of Europeans could imagine continuing to wear a face mask in public, this figure has now almost doubled to 41 percent. Only one in five Europeans said they do not plan on continuing to wear a mask on beyond the pandemic, at least in certain circumstances.

Confidence in conventional medicine is slipping

Of course, a decrease in satisfaction with healthcare systems begs the question whether this trend extends to conventional medicine as well. In fact, there has been a slight decrease in the number of people who say they trust conventional medicine as provided by general practitioners and in hospitals, albeit a slight one: while today, 65 percent of Europeans trust conventional medicine, this applied to 68 percent in 2021. Spain (78 percent) and the UK (73 percent), now joined by France (72 percent), remain its fiercest supporters. In addition, just over one in five Europeans like to stay up-to-date on alternative treatment options such as homeopathy and acupuncture. The greatest share can be found in Portugal (30 percent).

Almost 1 in 2 Europeans wary of epidemiologists, GPs deemed most credible

In a time where general and individual awareness of health-related matters continues to grow and misinformation circulates freely, the people and institutions providing

health-related information yield a considerable amount of power. Which actors currently enjoy the highest level of trust when it comes to matters of health?

In terms of trustworthiness, general practitioners (65 percent) are in the lead and have their most loyal fan bases in Belgium (76 percent), the Netherlands (75 percent) and Portugal (74 percent). Also, people above the age of 55, who supposedly spend more time talking to their GP than younger age groups, tend to trust the information obtained from them the most (between 70 and 80 percent). GPs are closely followed by scientists (61 percent), other medical professionals working in hospitals (60 percent), and pharmacists (57 percent). The latter are particularly well-respected in Belgium and the UK (68 percent each). Epidemiologists are perhaps one of the most controversial groups: while a slight majority 54 percent of Europeans trust their judgement on health-related matters, this varies greatly between countries. Portugal (69 percent) and Spain (67 percent) for instance have very high confidence in the information they provide, while people in Serbia (36 percent) and Kazakhstan (40 percent) are much more reserved.

Trust in pharmaceutical companies holding up

Speaking of reservations: 24 percent of Europeans trust the information they receive from pharmaceutical companies. People in the UK (39 percent) are three times more likely to perceive such information as accurate compared to the Austrian population (13 percent). In fact, pharmaceutical companies are the only group that has not forfeited trust in comparison to 2022. What did remain unchanged, however, is the media and politici

ans occupying the lower ranks in terms of trustworthiness. Just under one in four (24 percent) trust health-related information circulated by specialised health media. General media reach a mere half of that at 12 percent, but receive some extra support from the UK (20 percent) and Spain (19 percent). Another 12 percent trust the opinions of popular health influencers, followed by politicians at the end of the line with 9 percent. Their most loyal supporters can be found in the UK and the Netherlands (18 percent each), while people in the Czech Republic, Serbia, Austria and Romania have next to no faith in them whatsoever (4 percent each).

The pharmacy of the future: a holistic convenience provider

With pharmacists as one of the most credible sources of health-related information, it may come as no surprise that more than one in two Europeans (56 percent) visit a community pharmacy at least monthly, with 27 percent even going at least two to three times a month. The most avid pharmacy-frequenters include Serbia (45 percent), Romania, Italy (41 percent each) and Spain (38 percent). Still, the competition between pharmacies and online providers is intensifying. For this reason, we asked Europeans what their ideal pharmacy would look like: what services should they provide?

Understandably, people's expectations of what pharmacies should offer nowadays go far beyond simply collecting prescriptions and picking up OTC medicines. The number one service Europeans expect their pharmacy to offer is the opportunity to order medication online – a must for one in three Europeans, while another 49 percent say they would appreciate this. Over one in three (35 percent) have a desire for individual counselling on health-related topics, and 46 percent would welcome such a service. The opportunity of being tested for Covid-19, though a sign of the times, is also high on the list: 38 percent say pharmacies ought to offer this. In terms of convenience, home delivery by courier is a must for over one in four Europeans (26 percent), and just over half of them (51 percent) would at least appreciate such a service. Other potential offers regarded by some as a must include basic health check-ups and measurements (25 percent), ordering or invoicing via a digital app (24 percent) and the ability to be vaccinated at the pharmacy (20 percent).

According to Europeans, the pharmacy of the future is this: a combination of personalised care and consultation that offers the convenience of the digital age. Certainly easier said than done, but certainly necessary to ensure the evolution of pharmacies as we know them, so that they will continue to stand the test of time.

82%

say online purchases through their local pharmacy are either a must or would at least be appreciated.

