

Private and Entrepreneurial Commitment as a Way Out of the Crisis in the Healthcare System

EES economic talks in Montegrotto in northern Italy highlighted opportunities for self-directed and company-based health management.

Health is humanity's greatest asset – as the saying goes. All the more alarming, then, is the current state of our healthcare system due to a lack of viable reforms. The EES Health Conference, held from August 31 to September 2, 2025, in Montegrotto, Italy, unflinchingly exposed this critical issue. But it also highlighted where each of us can make a difference: The latest developments in medicine, technology, and prevention offer us unprecedented opportunities to take responsibility for our own health. At the same time, more and more companies are realizing that they benefit from promoting the health of their employees. While the event focused on the German healthcare system, its key statements and conclusions should be relevant to many countries in Europe.

"Health is not just an individual concern. It is and will remain a significant economic factor. Companies that invest in the well-being of their employees not only strengthen their quality of life but also their future viability. Healthy people are absent less often, think more clearly, act more creatively, and work more sustainably. They are therefore more productive," said EES President Dr. Ingo Friedrich. "In this context, I am deeply concerned about how the youngest generation assesses their future prospects in our country: Never before in the history of the Federal Republic have young people between the ages of 15 and 25 been as skeptical as they are today."

Health educator and EES Senator Ulrike Ditz sees a major reason for this in the "omnipresent threat of mental stress. More and more children and young people feel overwhelmed by the challenges and pressures of today. From morning till night, they are bombarded with anxiety about the future. Many of them spend a large part of the day dealing with things they have no control over, things they cannot change. As a result, they don't learn where their strengths lie. And many of them have no plan for their lives."



Ulrike Ditz, health educator and EES senator: "Basically, we have a dissatisfied society."

Added to this is the continuously declining academic standard at many German schools. Ulrike Ditz: "We are letting an entire generation fail, treating them with Ritalin and pacifying them with sedatives." Currently, the number one career aspiration is to become a civil servant. Security over freedom – a clear indication of how young people view their future prospects.

Exorbitantly High costs

"But the number of mothers and fathers under constant psychosocial stress, spending sleepless nights worrying about how they will manage the future, is also greater than ever," says Ulrike Ditz. Consequences of the relentless pressure to perform, both for young people and adults, include depression,

anxiety disorders, burnout, and ADHD – mental and psychological illnesses that now place an exorbitantly high burden on our society. According to Ulrike Ditz, these costs amounted to €100 billion across Europe in 1980. Currently, they stand at around €700 billion. By 2030, they are expected to rise to €1.2 trillion. Ulrike Ditz: “If we were to invest just a portion of this money in the education of young people, we could make a significant difference.”

The burnout network, which she founded in 2015 together with her nephew Patrick Wind – also a member of the Senate – engages with politicians at various levels about the issue of mental and psychological illness. Nevertheless, it is still not taken seriously enough.

Ulrike Ditz cited figures from the latest Gallup study: According to the study, only 15% of employees are satisfied with their jobs. 61% of employees are simply going through the motions. A mere 9% have an emotional connection to their employers – a new low. The costly consequences include mis-hires and workplace accidents, quality defects, low productivity, and dissatisfied customers. “Basically, we have a dissatisfied society,” the health educator concluded from these figures.



**Physiotherapist and EES Senator
Gregor Wedell: “Our welfare state is
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The German Healthcare System is Collapsing

Drastically increased contributions from both statutory and private health insurance companies, reduced benefits, and steadily longer waiting times for doctors – the quality of healthcare is declining, and trust in the system is decreasing. It's obvious: demographic change will exacerbate this trend.

“As someone who works in the healthcare system, I have to say: It's not sick. It's collapsing. Our welfare state is breaking down in many areas. But the healthcare system is suffering particularly badly,” said Gregor Wedell, physiotherapist and owner of Phy-4-You, a company specializing in workplace health promotion and prevention, based in Freising. He is also an EES member and a cooperation partner of the Burnout Network.

Workplace Health Management as a Way Out

“Our healthcare system can no longer maintain the health of employees,” Gregor Wedell stated emphatically. “For 79% of physiotherapists, the waiting time for those with statutory health insurance is 28 days. In the orthopedic field, illnesses typically become chronic within six to eight weeks. This means that many patients only reach us physiotherapists once their condition has become chronic. They then often need one or two prescriptions before we can get them back to the condition they were in when they first sought an appointment.”

Waiting times for appointments with many specialists are considerably longer, depending on the region and time of year. In some rural areas, those with statutory health insurance have to wait up to six months for an appointment with a specialist in psychosomatic medicine or psychotherapy, and sometimes up to 180 days for an MRI appointment. “The German population is becoming increasingly ill. In recent years, an immense backlog of multimorbid patients has built up,” said Gregor Wedell, outlining

the consequences of this development and the central question it poses for companies: "And how healthy can companies be with sick employees?"

Companies that value a healthy workforce are increasingly taking responsibility for their employees' health themselves. This opens up an attractive field of work, especially for physiotherapists. Gregor Wedell explains: "Our government, too, has long since concluded from the current state of our healthcare system that it should promote workplace health management in order to establish a cornerstone of preventative healthcare." Health insurance companies now cover a portion of the costs; they are legally obligated to do so.



Prof. Dr. Matthias Friedrich, Professor at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) in Montreal, Canada:
"The changes required in the health system will have to come via the private medical sector."

Workplace health promotion is characterized by a short return on investment. According to a Gallup study from 2025, 78% of German employees have mentally checked out and are only working to rule – resulting in productivity losses of between €131.1 and €134.7 billion annually. "At the companies we work with, employees sometimes come to work on sick leave because they can't get an appointment at any doctor's office outside the company. In some cases, they even come to work with mild symptoms because they've had the experience that we can relieve their pain. And many prefer to give us the chance to get rid of their headaches rather than take sick leave," says Gregor Wedell.

Medicine 3.0 – Innovative Technologies for Self-Directed Health Management

"Good medicine for everyone is no longer financially feasible today," stated Prof. Dr. Matthias Friedrich, professor at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) in Montreal, Canada. Healthcare systems everywhere are groaning under the strain. This is no different in Canada than in Germany, and considerably worse in the USA. Americans now spend 18 to 19% of their gross domestic product on medicine. "The necessary changes in the healthcare system will have to come through the private medical sector," Matthias Friedrich is convinced.

After decades of research in cardiac magnetic resonance imaging and sonography, the professor eventually turned to cohort research. "I wanted to better understand what defines health and illness and to identify more specifically which risk factors play which roles – environmental influences, mental factors, as well as genetic and other factors. To delve even deeper beyond these general risk factors, I ultimately launched the Courtois Cardiovascular Signature Program in Montreal," explained the program's scientific director. Its goal is to uncover in detail the connections between people's lifestyles and heart problems – and thus empower them to take individual and proactive steps to prevent risks.

"Arteriosclerosis, that is, diseases of the blood vessels—primarily the coronary arteries and cerebral vessels—with their long-term consequences of stroke and heart attack, are now responsible for about 50% of deaths and the associated costs," Matthias Friedrich explained. In the USA, these costs amount to approximately \$1 billion daily. The number one risk factor is demonstrably our diet, but also our lifestyle. Added to this are stress, mental strain, and subjectively perceived unhappiness such as inferiority complexes. The best way to eat healthily is to eat only what nature provides. A major problem in our society is that we have easy access to things that give us a short-term boost but harm our health. Sugar, for example, has become one of the most important drugs in our society.

Live Healthier Longer

"People are hardly living longer anymore. But they have more illnesses," Matthias Friedrich confirmed, echoing the statement of his predecessor, Gregor Wedell. "Instead of trying to extend our lives, we should individually strive to extend our health span – that is, to stay healthy longer and age more healthily."

This is where Medicine 3.0 comes into play – innovative, increasingly AI-supported methods and technologies that enable individualized health management. Traditional medicine is used after symptoms have appeared. Medicine 3.0 intervenes earlier: proactively and preventively, before people become ill. "Each of us has an individual health risk based on various factors. In our research program, we examined and measured these factors in 4,000 people, analyzed them using AI, and created individual signatures or personal fingerprints of health risks from this data. From these signatures, we were then able to develop individualized prevention plans," explained Matthias Friedrich, outlining the viable approach. At the same time, general conclusions about the health risks of the population could be drawn from this data.



EES Senator Andrea Wirsching from the Franconian winery Hans Wirsching KG spoke on the topic: "Can enjoying wine be healthy?"

But innovative technologies can also support individual health management. Examples include smart rings and smartphone apps that measure heart rate and body temperature or monitor respiration. If a health risk increases, they automatically sound an alarm. "It's astonishing what these devices can do," says Matthias Friedrich. "Given the current state of our healthcare system, we must add prevention to Medicine 1.0 and Medicine 2.0. And in my view, stress prevention has absolute priority here." The new technology will fundamentally change the healthcare industry – and open the door for entrepreneurs to new markets with enormous sales potential.

A Question of Measure

In Montegrotto, the EES welcomed Andrea Wirsching from the Franconian winery Hans Wirsching KG as a new member of its senate – an event that included a small wine tasting. This naturally raised the question of whether and what health risks are associated with wine consumption. "Basically, all alcohol consumption is harmful. But here, too – as in many areas of our lives – it's a matter of moderation and personal responsibility. Enjoying a glass of wine now and then is part of the pleasures of life," said Matthias Friedrich.



The topic “Health: the highest good. How can we actively influence it?” was on the agenda at the EWS economic talks from August 31 to September 2, 2025 in Montegrotto, Italy.

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