

## Important factors for health communication in Europe

**Resource:** **Better Practices – Important factors for health communication in Europe**

**Objective:**

Finding solutions to overcome deficiencies in health crisis communication are of great interest to all stakeholders concerned. Factors thought as important for health crisis communication also present major weaknesses and are thus in the greatest need of improvement. It is possible that you may find, in the following list, factors that need improvements also in your region.

### Description

The most important factors in need of improvement in Europe are:

- Consistent and reliable information in all communication channels,
- Regular cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the crisis communication process, Communication competence of health authority staff and health experts,
- Maintenance of trust in health authorities,
- Sense of responsibility of the media to provide adequate information and
- Establishment of a standardized communication procedure (guidelines) within an organization.

Some of the key specific factors needed for effective health communication in the European context are listed below.

#### 1. Trustworthy communication flow, including combatting contradictory or factually wrong statements

This is represented by unified and consistent communication messages and regular contacts between the key health crisis stakeholders, especially crisis managers.

#### 2. Reducing information gap

Constant and consistent information flow between all concerned, especially during the (pre)crisis preparation phases is of key importance.

#### 3. More robust involvement of health professionals in health crisis communication

A possible solution would be to engage family doctors in a more sustainable and organized manner in health crisis communication efforts.

#### 4. Involvement of voluntary organizations in health crisis communication effort

The importance of voluntary organizations has been raised at local operational levels - such organizations could play a similar role as family doctors, linking health crisis managers with the general population.



## 5. Addressing regional and operational differences between the key stakeholders

It will be important to adjust content and methodology of health crisis response to reflect a) regional needs and b) whether the stakeholders are active at a local, regional or national level.

## 6. Addressing uncertainties associated with health crisis

This issue needs to be dealt with as part of the overall strategy on how to deal with media and the public.

## 7. Communication competence, especially how to effectively deal with the media

Good working relationship with the media is essential as they are the link between health authorities and the public.

## 8. Regaining/maintaining public trust

Once lost, trust is difficult to re-gain. Trustworthy information source is crucial during a health crisis.

## 9. Improving sense of responsibility amongst the media during a health crisis

It is important to engage members of the media in a dialogue on how to best handle impending or ongoing health crisis as this will influence the outcome of health communication campaigns.

## 10. Use of new social media

Social media is an important tool to reach specific target groups and an important platform to monitor public opinions and activities during a crisis situation.

