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Cross-agency knowledge for One Health action

Joint statement by European Union Agencies

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European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)

European Environment Agency (EEA)

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

European Medicines Agency (EMA)



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Cross-agency knowledge for One Health action

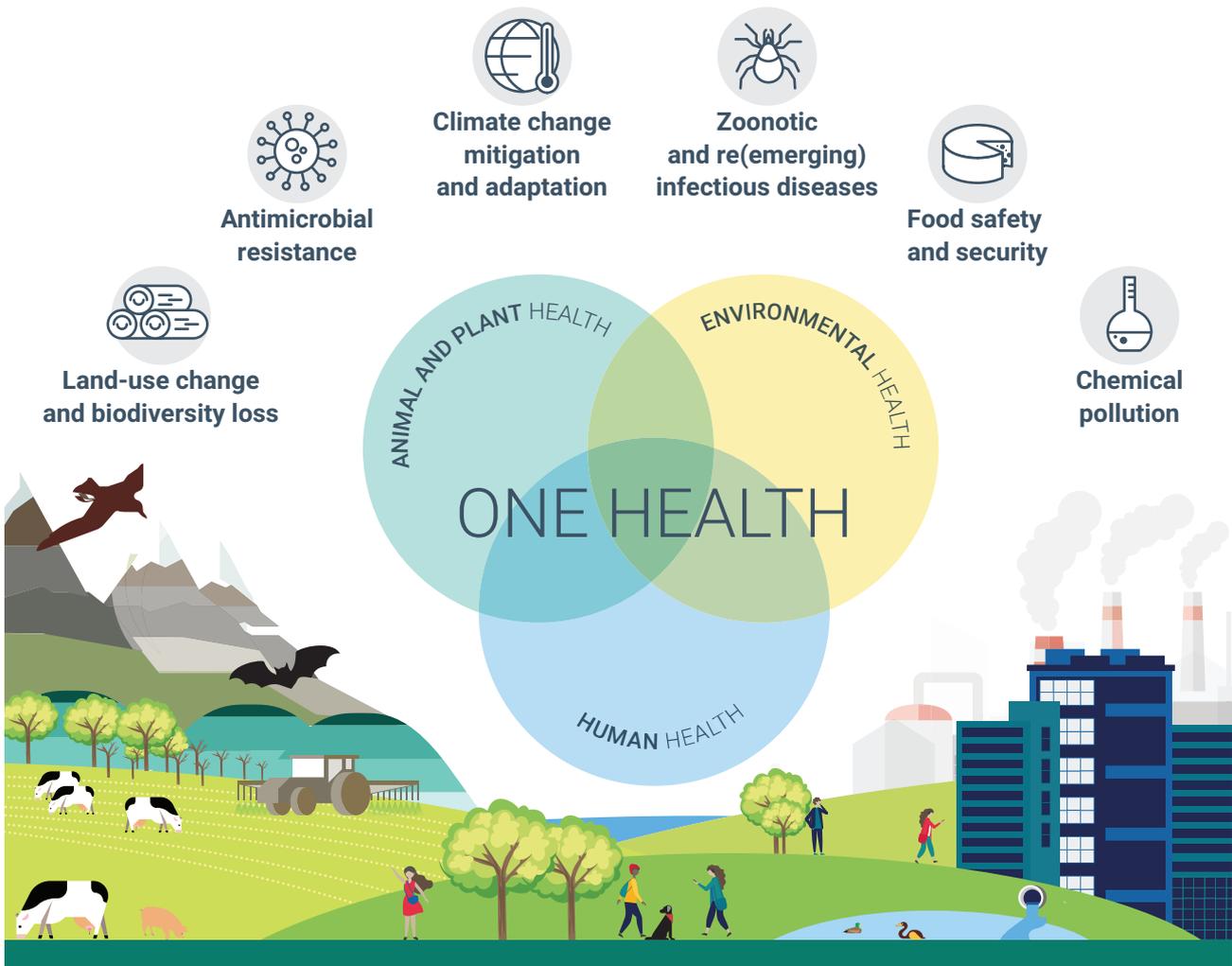
Summary

Addressing threats to health and well-being requires implementing a One Health approach, recognising the interdependence of people, animals, plants and ecosystems. In this statement, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), European Environment Agency (EEA), European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and European Medicines Agency (EMA) express their joint commitment as EU agencies to fully support the One Health agenda in Europe.

Europe is facing increasingly complex and frequent threats to health and well-being. Many of these threats are linked to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and they serve as a stark reminder that human health is strictly interconnected with the health of animals, plants and ecosystems. No individual discipline or sector acting in isolation can respond to these threats. The urgent need for multisectoral and transdisciplinary collaboration across the domains of human, animal, plant and ecosystem health is captured by the One Health approach. This approach is now widely recognised at an international level, as attested by the ongoing negotiations on a [global pandemic](#) agreement and the efforts of the [One Health Quadripartite](#). The growing relevance of One Health is also evident in the EU, reflected in the ambitious goals contained under the [European Green Deal](#) and its associated policy strategies (e.g. [Farm to Fork Strategy](#), [Biodiversity Strategy to 2030](#), [Zero Pollution Action Plan](#)), the [8th Environment Action Programme](#), the [European Health Union](#), the [Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe](#) and the [EU Global Health Strategy](#).

The benefits of implementing One Health to address issues including zoonotic and (re-)emerging infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases linked to environmental risk factors, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and climate adaptation (Fig. 1) are clear. A comprehensive One Health approach, which includes tackling drivers of environmental degradation, preventing risks at source by prioritising upstream prevention and investing in preparedness interventions, is essential to deliver health security (OHHLEP et al., 2023). There is evidence that applying such an approach can reduce the incidence and societal costs of disease outbreaks and other health threats, or even prevent their emergence (Zinsstag et al., 2023). At the same time, the One Health approach helps reduce human pressures on the environment. For example, it could make food systems more sustainable, thereby safeguarding key societal needs such as food security and access to clean air and water (Devos et al., 2022a).

Figure 1 Examples of issues that can be addressed through a One Health approach



Source: EEA.

Previous EU-funded research and innovation (R&I) programmes such as the [Med-Vet-Net Network of Excellence](#) and the [One Health European Joint Programme](#) have already enhanced transdisciplinary research cooperation on One Health topics. The One Health approach has also been adopted in the EU response to the threat of AMR, as illustrated by the 2017 [One Health Action Plan against AMR](#). These efforts will need to continue to bridge the gap between science and policy, and fully implement the One Health approach in Europe.

The One Health approach must now be translated into action at different levels of governance. This must be supported by a strong interface between science, policy and society which responds to key principles of collaboration, coordination, communication and capacity-building (OHHLEP et al., 2022).

As the five EU Agencies providing scientific advice on environment, public health and food safety, we are fully committed to this objective, and have recently established a [cross-agency task force](#) to further implement our own collaborative efforts on One Health. We wish to emphasise four urgent priorities for action:

- 1 First and foremost, we are convinced that the scientific evidence base for One Health action needs strengthening. Ongoing knowledge gaps should be filled for areas such as AMR, infectious diseases, chemical pollution and the effects of climate change on health. Data availability, accessibility, interoperability and reusability must be improved. Horizon Europe, the current EU framework programme for R&I, and the [EU4Health programme](#) are critical in this respect. As EU agencies, we are committed to helping frame research needs from a One Health perspective, promoting synergies between R&I efforts and making use of relevant research outcomes (Bronzwaer et al., 2022).
- 2 Second, the One Health approach should be mainstreamed in the area of scientific advice and risk assessment. As EU agencies, we recognise that our scientific advice on topics such as animal and environmental health, food safety, environmental sustainability, climate change-induced health impacts and nutrition must be increasingly integrated and approached from a One Health perspective (Devos et al., 2022b). In the area of regulatory science, more proactive sharing of information between our agencies will facilitate the transition to more integrated risk assessment of pesticides and other chemicals. Collaboration under the recent [regulation on serious cross-border threats to health](#) will support the EU's preparedness and response to emerging health crises in a way that is consistent with the One Health approach.
- 3 Third, we highlight the importance of establishing intersectoral One Health coordination mechanisms including human, animal and environmental sectors and aligning surveillance and early warning systems in Europe with the One Health concept. Integrated surveillance systems, including ecological monitoring and information on drivers of disease emergence, should be prioritised. In turn, this would help overcome existing silos between sectors and actors (Hayman et al., 2023).
- 4 Fourth, strengthening One Health educational and training programmes remains a key enabler for successfully designing and implementing One Health initiatives and policies (dos S. Ribeiro et al., 2019). We are convinced that efforts to build One Health capacities for risk assessors and professionals from the medical, veterinary, agriculture and environmental sectors need to be supported and promoted (FAO et al., 2022).

As EU agencies, we believe that taking a One Health approach is necessary to successfully address the multiple challenges facing the EU in the areas of human, animal and plant health, food safety, the climate crisis and environmental sustainability. Recognising the important work being undertaken to operationalise the approach across EU policies and actions, we also reaffirm our commitment to working closely with the European Commission in transforming the vision of One Health into action. Through [our cross-agency task force](#), we strive to facilitate strategic coordination within our agencies in the implementation of the One Health approach; promote research coordination, capacity building and One Health-driven agenda setting; ensure that our communication, support to EU policy processes and engagement with relevant stakeholders is increasingly integrated; and support the development of joint activities and the sharing of data and information.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to support the implementation of the One Health approach. By doing so, we will be better able to prevent, predict, detect and respond to health threats. We can improve health for all and protect the life-support systems upon which our economies and societies depend.

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