2026: The Year in Health So Far

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EMJ
European Medical Journal

Key Evidence, Policy, and Health-System Developments from the NHS, EU, and WHO



NHS (England)
Measured Performance Gaps

Baroness Amos' Maternity Report



- National level examination of maternity services highlighting severe, system-wide failings[1]
- Recommendations likely to shape maternity policy[1]

National Diabetes Audit



Recent quarterly findings in 2024/2025 saw that only **~43%** of people with Type 1 diabetes and **~58%** with Type 2 diabetes received all eight NICE-recommended care processes.[2]

Room to Breathe: State of the Nation 2026

- **37%** of people hospitalised with COPD were still smokers, despite being in hospital with a smoking-related disease[3]
- Only **38%** of children admitted with a severe/life-threatening asthma attack received steroids within 1 hour, the recommended timeframe[3]
- Only **38.8%** of hospitals met recommended asthma nurse staffing levels[3]



National Ovarian Cancer Audit



~40% of cases diagnosed through emergency admission.[4]

Major variation in treatment of advanced disease.[4]

EU (Europe)
Policy and Implementation

EU Safe Hearts Plan



- Targeting a **25%** drop in premature CV deaths by 2035 by shifting focus from late crisis care to a proactive, life-course strategy[5]
- Parliament to curb the commercial drivers of poor health through stricter advert controls for nicotine, alcohol, and UPF products[5]

Proposed policy and target

EHDS Implementation



Operational development

2026 marks the movement from legislation to implementationof EU -wide health data sharing and secondary use for research.[6]

European Brain Health Partnership

Major research initiative with over 55 partner institutions from over 30 countries participating from Europe and beyond.[7]



Research initiative

Policy

European Biotechnology Act

The Commission published its supporting impact analysis for the proposed act.[8]



In June 2026, the Council agreed its negotiating position on the proposed act, including updated rules for genetically modified micro-organisms and organ processing.[8]

Legislative milestone

WHO/ECDC (Global)
Global Frameworks, Burden, and Progress

Global Action Plan for AMR 2026-2036

Builds on the 2015–2030 framework[9]

Expanded from five to six strategic objectives to combat drug-resistant infections globally[9]

Includes enhanced governance, sustainable financing, and accountability[9]



Strategy

Global Status Report on Cancer 2026

Annual cancer cases projected to surge to nearly 35 million by 2050[10]



Cancer remains the second leading cause of death globally after CVD[10]

Disease burden

TB Surveillance and Monitoring in Europe 2026

About one in five estimated TB cases in the WHO European Region in 2024 were undiagnosed or unreported.[11]

The Region carries a disproportionate share of the global rifampicin-/multidrug-resistant TB burden (23% of new cases versus 3.2% globally).[11]

Early diagnosis and surveillance

Global Hepatitis Report 2026

Hepatitis C prevention has improved markedly but remains off track for 2030 elimination targets[12]

Hepatitis B and C account for over **95%** of all viral hepatitis-related deaths[12]



Progress against targets

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Abbreviations:
AMR: antimicrobial resistance; CV: cardiovascular; CVD: cardiovascular disease; ECDC: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; EHDS: European Health Data Space; NICE: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; TB: tuberculosis; UPF: ultra-processed food.