



Declining resources, rising needs: global health under pressure

Eight NGOs launch the Health Impact Coalition to safeguard universal access to healthcare

With health systems increasingly weakened by political, economic, climate and health crises - and with international cooperation budgets falling by 25% - eight Belgian health NGOs have joined forces to put forward sustainable, inclusive and innovative solutions. Together, Action Damien, Chaîne de l'Espoir, Handicap International, Light for the World, Médecins du Monde, Médecins Sans Vacances, Memisa and Viva Salud are launching the Health Impact Coalition, a new coalition committed to defending the fundamental right to health for all.

A critical context demanding new responses

Today, 4.5 billion people still lack access to primary healthcare services and 2 billion face financial hardship due to healthcare costs (WHO).

Health systems worldwide are buckling under the pressure of epidemics, climate change, conflict and political instability, alongside the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance that threatens the success of care and healing worldwide. Structural challenges -fragmented services, shortages of trained staff and shrinking budgets - further erode resilience. International cooperation budgets are being cut across donor countries, including Belgium, which has just announced a 25% reduction under its latest federal budget agreement.

In this fragile context, eight Belgian NGOs are forming a coalition grounded in extensive field experience, internationally recognised Belgian health expertise, and strong partnerships - including with the Belgian government's international development agency Enabel and the Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp. Placing the most vulnerable populations at the centre of their action, these organisations work daily to strengthen health systems, support health workers and facilities, empower affected communities and contribute to more equitable health policies.

"The world is changing and health systems are under pressure. By joining forces within the Health Impact Coalition, we aim to reinvent cooperation and deliver concrete, positive solutions that improve health for all," says Elies Van Belle, General Manager of Memisa.

A strategic response to shrinking budgets

In the face of a 25% cut to international cooperation funding, the Health Impact Coalition is choosing to coordinate more effectively, target interventions more precisely and maximise impact through collective action.

“As needs rise and the progress built over years is at risk of unravelling, we may be forced to do more with less. Our choice is to move forward in synergy - leveraging our complementarities and the strength of Belgian medical expertise—to achieve more meaningful impact,” explains Pascale Barnich, General Manager of Action Damien - Damiaanactie.

More than a temporary network, the Health Impact Coalition is a long-term alliance built on a shared strategy, joint commitments and pooled expertise. Its ambition is to combine complementary strengths: prevent disease more effectively, reduce transmission, and enhance the quality of care from community level to specialist hospitals. This will enable patients to be supported by better-equipped professionals and to access stronger, more resilient services—ensuring holistic care for visible conditions, invisible illnesses and mental health needs, all essential for dignified and lasting social reintegration.

Concrete collaboration already underway

The coalition’s added value lies in integrating diverse areas of expertise to deliver innovative, inclusive and coordinated approaches.

Light for the World supports people with visual impairments; Memisa strengthens access to primary healthcare; Handicap International advances the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups; Médecins du Monde reinforces global and mental health approaches. Specialist surgical care—such as that provided by Chaîne de l’Espoir—and community-based anti-stigma initiatives further complement this work.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a hospital consortium - bringing together Médecins Sans Vacances, Chaîne de l’Espoir and Action Damien - shares best practice across several hospitals in Kinshasa to raise the quality of care. Other programmes show how bundling complementary services within a single facility (ophthalmology, rehabilitation, mental health, specialist surgery, etc.) creates more coherent, integrated pathways for patients. A structural shift impossible for one NGO to achieve alone.

The coalition plans to operate across four continents - Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East - where collaboration can multiply impact.

“Health is a fundamental right, not a privilege,” emphasises Erwin Telemans, President of the Coalition. *“Too many people still face barriers to care due to fragile or fragmented systems. Through the Health Impact Coalition, we are challenging this reality and building sustainable solutions, regardless of context or political pressures.”*

Health Impact Coalition figures :

- 8 NGO's
- Present in 25 countries
- 100+ partnerships
- 1 650 staff members
- 16 000 volunteers
- More than 10 million people reached every year

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More info : <https://www.healthimpactcoalition.org/who-we-are>