

A week among the greatest of mountains and minds: My experience at the European Health Forum Gastein

Janneke van Oirschot, HAI's AI & Health Project coordinator took part in the Young Forum Gastein Scholarship programme of this year's European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). Below she shares some of the highlights of her experience.

This September, I had the amazing opportunity to attend the EHFG as part of the Young Forum Gastein Scholarship programme. The week spent in the picturesque setting of Gastein, surrounded by the Austrian Alps, was a chance to exchange and be inspired by some of Europe's brightest minds in public health research, and policy.

The Theme: Democracy, Demographics, and Digitalisation

This year's forum centred around the theme of democracy, demographics, and digitalisation, and how these factors shape European health systems now and in the future. What struck me was how many of the conversations, on and off-stage, evolved from shared values around health and well-being, which provided a strong baseline for fruitful exchanges of ideas. In addition to the main conference sessions, me and my fellow 'Young Gasteiners' took part in tailored workshops, networking events, and reflection sessions, guided by one-another and some high-level leaders in the field.

Key Highlights: Sparking New Ideas

Here are some key highlights which really provoked my thoughts at EHFG:

1. Social Media and Mental Health

In a session on social media and its impact on young people, [Conor Warren](#), CEO of a youth-led mental health organisation, presented a nuanced view. While many argue that social media is damaging to mental health, he highlighted how it can also serve as a positive platform, allowing young people to broaden their horizons and access experiences they wouldn't encounter otherwise.

However, not all aspects of social media were viewed so positively. [Kathrin Karsay](#), another expert in the session, pointed out a growing concern: the "glamorisation and trivialisation" of mental health. For many influencers, mental health has become a business model, leading to a superficial conception of what is a deeply complex issue.

2. Digitalisation of Healthcare

The digital transformation of healthcare is often over-hyped, but [Mirka Cikkelova](#), General

Secretary of the European Patient Safety Foundation, highlighted how the fatigue experienced by healthcare providers, is a major obstacle to effective and responsible digitalisation.

There has been significant investment in developing new digital tools, but often the day-to-day realities of healthcare professionals who are expected to implement them are overlooked, decreasing these tools' added value and use. It was a valuable reminder that the success of healthcare digitalisation isn't just about the technology—it's about the people who use it.

3. European Health Data Space

In a session on the European Health Data Space, [Barbara Prainsack](#), Professor at the University of Vienna, emphasised the need to differentiate between public and private value that will arise from the initiative. She stressed that health data access bodies should play a central role in ensuring that the use of this data ultimately serves the public good rather than purely commercial interests.

A Joyful Opportunity for Young Public Health Professionals

If you are a young professional in the field of public health, I cannot recommend the Young Forum Gastein programme enough. The combination of learning, networking, and reflecting with peers in such a breathtaking setting is well thought out. Whether it's through the engaging discussions, group tasks, or social events, the atmosphere is energizing and enjoyable. Participating in EHFG was an unforgettable experience, one that I'll carry with me as I continue to work at the intersection of AI and health.

If you have the chance, make sure you don't miss out on the next edition of this inspiring event!