Author’s response to reviews

Title: A quick and selected overview of the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health

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Author’s response to reviews:

Comment: Reviewer #1: I understand this contribution follows an invitation from the journal to the author and that comments of a first draft were provided by the editor.

However, there are minor changes required before its publication:

- Section 1, when mandates are named, are these mandates the same as the Opinions? If different topics, maybe good to add a footnote the first time this is mentioned explaining which mandates are these.

Reply: Added “Each opinion is originated by a mandate set between the European Commission and the Expert Panel.”

Comment: - Section 1, last paragraph, second line, "...topics treated in the Opinion were...": substitute by "...topics treated in the different Opinions were...", to be consistent with the rest of the document.

Reply: Thank you. Done.

Comment: - Section 2.1: provide the long name of PPPs the first time that initials are used, and include initials in brackets: "...public-private partnerships (PPPs)"

Reply: Thank you. Done.

Comment: - Section 2.1: line 4, "...concerning a DG SANCO report externally commissioned": to whom? On PPPs? This part remains too vague. Maybe good to add a foot note explaining which report is this, or simply saying "...a DG SANCO report externally commissioned on PPPs in Europe" or similar.
Reply: Thank you. Adopted the formulation suggested.

Comment: - Section 2.2: ".with a strong impact..": which had a strong impact? Which may have a strong impact in policymakers? Better to clarify this strong impact, as the reference in the Lancet is mentioned much later in the section.

Reply: Moved the Lancet reference here. There is no formal measure of impact. I clarified adding the motive for the claim “As example, this Opinion, and its definition of primary care, received attention from The Lancet (2014), bringing it to a much wider audience and positive comments were informally directed to the panel members.”

Comment: - Section 2.2: "...Hopefully, it will help...": even if it is a personal contribution, I would substitute "hopefully" for something less vague. For example: "It is expected it will help...", "If x conditions allow it, it will help"

Reply: Agree. Changed to “It is intended to help…”

Comment: - Section 2.2: last sentence "...For many health systems, coping with this definition will lead to important changes". Which changes? In priority setting? In the redefinition of primary care itself? To be clarified.

Reply: Changed to “coping with this definition will lead to important changes in the way primary care is provided to the population.”

Comment: - Section 2.3: "...This definition also makes clear...", delete "it clear" as it is repeated.

Reply: Done.

Comment: Reviewer #2: This review of a committee lacks several important elements of critical transparancy.

Reply: The full information on the panel is available on the web. The website address is now provided to the interested reader (although a quick web search under the terms EXPH and European Commission retrieves it immediately).
Comment: There is a lack of clarity about how the committee discussed was selected,

Reply: I refer to the website of EXPH (https://ec.europa.eu/health/expert_panel/home_en and https://ec.europa.eu/health/expert_panel/about_en) for information. It was an internal decision of the European Commission based on a call for applications.

Comment: what its terms of reference where (?to advice the EC?),

Reply: The terms of reference are set in the “mandates” for each Opinion. Both the mandates and the Opinions are available on the website.

Comment: what the target audience of its publications were,

Reply: Whoever is interested in the issues raised in each mandate. The primary audience is the European Commission.

Comment: how was the demand for this commission determined,

Reply: The European Commission sets mandates that give origin to each Opinion. Both are available in the website.

Comment: was there a political background (request by Parliament of the MS?).

Reply: No.

Comment: Has there been independent scientific reviews of the publications?

Reply: No. In some Opinions a public consultation procedure was followed. Both scientific and non-scientific (advocacy, comments) reviews were provided in the course of the public consultation. All details on public consultations are available on the website of the EXPH.

In one case, a summary of the Opinion was submitted and published as Editorial in the European Journal of Health Economics.
Comment: What has the Commission done with it?

Reply: This question should be asked to the European Commission. As an independent panel, the members of the EXPH do not interfere with the internal processes of the European Commission.

Comment: Does it have any relation to other EC related processes, i.e. on NCD's, healthy ageing, JAF Health, etc.

Reply: There were contacts, during the Opinion process, with other groups set by the European Commission on related matters.

Comment: In addition it is far from clear in several places whether we read the author's opinion or a summary of the committees publications.

Reply: I make clear from the start (in the Abstract) that this comment is a personal review, so it should read as “Author’s opinion” whenever in doubt. The disclaimer states “I was a member of the Expert Panel during its first term (2013-2016). The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the other members of the Expert Panel or those of any institution.”

Comment: Why have these 'important' publications not been reviewed in scientific journals.

Reply: It is not clear why should they be reviewed in scientific journals, as the purpose is not to advance knowledge. It is to provide useful discussions on issues of interest to policy makers. It reflects the views of the member of the panel, based on their knowledge of scientific evidence.

Comment: What are the ifs and buts....??

Reply: I suggest a reading of the Opinions to a discussion of “ifs and buts”. Given the length of the Comment suggested in the invitation it was impossible to introduce all “ifs and buts” of all the Opinions (or even of the Opinions reviewed in more detail”. Somehow I feel the reviewer would ask for a broader view if I had concentrated on the “ifs and buts” of one Opinion in particular.

Comment: Does it really help to have such an enormously broad definition of primary care?
Reply: Yes. It does.

Comment: Can we find any critical comments anywhere?
Reply: Probably. Nothing is unanimous. Though comments received have been positive. The Lancet review was, in particular, unsolicited by EXPH and seen as a positive comment. Some Opinions followed a public consultation procedure. Comments from interested parties can be found in the website of the Expert Panel. Not all comments are positive.

Comment: Has the Commission asked the Member States for comments and whether they thought these publications useful?
Reply: This question should be addressed to the European Commission. I have no way to know whether, or not, it was done. The renewal of the EXPH panel suggests that the Member States found useful the first panel.

Comment: How do OECD and WHO (Observatory) rate these publications?
Reply: I have absolutely no idea.

Comment: In short...to vague, not really critical and finally....what is the message?
Reply: The message is simple: The EXPH provided Opinions on issues of interest to the European Commission and to policy makers in Member States. These Opinions provide a consensus view from a group, intending to clarify these issues and helping decision makers form their views.

Comment: Do it again, take up the recommendations (and how?), do it again with another procedure?
Reply: Not clear what is the suggestion contained in these two questions. If it is a suggestion to redo the text based on the recommendations of the Opinions, I would think it does not make sense to talk about recommendations without describing the context of Opinions. My take is the reviewer did not find any use in the text. I am sorry for that. The question about the procedure should be directed to the editor, as this was an invited piece and I followed (at least I tried to
follow) the terms of reference provided by the editor. Perhaps the reviewer will be able, after reading the Opinions, to provide the critical view he/she suggests and submit for publication.