



A crisis of trust? Europeans count on conventional medicine and healthcare systems – mostly

- 71 % of Europeans remain satisfied with their healthcare system
- Doctors and nurses named most important actors in dealing with Covid (81 %)
- Politicians deemed less trustworthy than pharmaceutical companies
- Approval of remote treatment via webcam on the decline – despite Covid

No other event in recent world history has changed our lives as fundamentally as the Covid pandemic. Seemingly overnight, everything changed. When Europe went into lockdown, its population went into a combination of hibernation and survival mode, stepping back to make room for the people in charge: especially for front-line workers, who were charged primarily to get us back on track. Without a doubt, there is much to come to terms with in the aftermath of the pandemic. Not only the lives to be mourned, but also how the situation was dealt with in general. Covid has left its mark on Europeans, so much is clear. But how will we come out on the other side of this? What have we learned? Who will we trust? Who has some catching up to do after the pandemic, and what does this mean for our future?

Slight decrease in satisfaction with healthcare systems

Despite hundreds of thousands of casualties caused by Covid across Europe, approval of healthcare systems remains relatively stable: Whereas in February 2020, 74 % of Europeans were satisfied with the healthcare system in their respective countries, this figure has decreased by a hardly noticeable 3 % across a somewhat expanded sample of countries.

Though the overall picture remains almost identical, proportionate shifts have taken place – and while it might be

a tempting assumption, these changes cannot be automatically attributed to national Covid-mortality rates. In the UK, the country which mourned the most deaths during the pandemic in Europe, satisfaction with the healthcare system has increased significantly from 85 % in early 2020 to 91 %. Countries with similar developments include Russia (34 % in 2020 to 41 % in 2021), Serbia (37 % to 49 %) and, though less pronounced, Germany (80 % in 2020 to 82 % in 2021).

Switzerland (91 %), Belgium and Austria (89 %), the Czech Republic (83 %), France (85 %) and Spain (80 %) are either satisfied or very satisfied with their healthcare systems, although support has slightly wavered in the five countries that were included in the 2020 survey. At 79 %, the Dutch are still considerably content. Portugal (74 %) and Italy (69 %) are somewhere in the middle, while Poland (36 %) and Ukraine (25 %) are least satisfied. Although the overall satisfaction with healthcare systems has remained stable, many respondents do not believe that their country would be better prepared for a future crisis: 1 in 3 Europeans are either convinced that any attempts to plan ahead for a pandemic would be in vain (20 %) or that their healthcare system would probably fail (15 %). The remaining 59 % are more optimistic – however, almost 1 in 2 people (46 %) still believe that much is to be learned from Covid.



15 %

think their healthcare system would probably fail in another pandemic.

Doctors and nurses steal the show – and rightfully so

With everything left to process once we leave the pandemic behind, Europeans are very much aware that it is first and foremost thanks to the relentless dedication and commitment of doctors, nurses and other medical staff that we are on the mend. 81 % of Europeans say that medical professionals have been the most important contributors in overcoming Covid. Pharmacists come in at second place (49 %), closely followed by pharmaceutical companies (47 %). Considering all the rules and restrictions they abided by for months to avoid the spread of the virus, 1 in 3 Europeans see it fit to pat themselves on the back for their efforts. Neither politicians nor the media reap much gratitude for their actions – or lack thereof – during Covid: together, they occupy the back ranks with 22 % each.

Pharmaceutical companies deemed more credible than politicians

The perceived contribution of the abovementioned groups to the Covid crisis can also be linked to their credibility and trustworthiness regarding health matters. Doctors remain the most reliable source of information for Europeans (73 %) and are closely followed by pharmacists and scientists (60 %). While 24 % trust health-related information shared by pharmaceutical companies, only 7 % can confidently say the same about politicians. At 29 %, specialised health media are much more credible than the general media (10 %).

Health influencers appeal mainly to the young

With 54 % of Europeans declaring that they have increased their online searches for health topics over the past year,

what role do health influencers play for Europeans in our day and age? While many of us have inarguably spent a lot of time on our phones – even more so during lockdown – online personalities seem to have played a modest role in challenging longstanding health habits. The majority of Europeans remain yet to be won over by healthcare influencers: Only 7 % confess they have ever been inspired to become healthier by an online personality. However, among people between the ages of 18 and 34, this number is almost twice as high at 13 %. This increase is easily explicable with a glance at their user habits, with the majority of young adults frequenting various social media platforms daily.

Nevertheless, many Europeans are recognising the role online personalities have come to play in recent years. Across the continent, a little over 1 in 5 Europeans say influencers have gained some more authority during the pandemic, but remain cautious of them due to their lack of medical knowledge. An additional 23 % of Europeans are convinced influencers have gained additional overall relevance due to Covid, however they remain mostly irrelevant to their lives. While 13 % of Europeans believe that online personalities will soon become more influential for health-related topics, 36 % find this to be rather unlikely.

Europe fed up with webcams, causing approval for online consultations to slide

Granted, we have all had our fair share of online-meetings during the pandemic: be it work-related or with friends and family. Resulting from that is a certain webcam-fatigue that has taken over Europe – and evidently, it also includes virtual consultation hours. The digital communication channels many GPs set up in lieu of in-person appointments to keep waiting rooms from filling up are waning in popularity: In comparison to 70 % of Europeans who were ready to embrace a consultation via webcam in 2020, a more balanced 57 % approve of remote treatment in 2021.

The European's trust in conventional medicine, however, is a constant in unsteady times: 68% of the population count on it – a slight decrease compared to 2020, where the approval rate was two percent higher. The UK (83 %) and Spain (80 %) are the most passionate advocates for conventional medicine, while Serbians prefer to stay up to date on alternative and homeopathic treatments (31 %). Notably, men tend to rely more on conventional medicine (73 %) than women (64 %).

