

The Healthacross initiative

Lower Austria is located in the heart of Europe, with a 414 km long border to the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and in close proximity to Hungary. The province is by size the biggest of Austria and has 1,67 million residents. Led by the European spirit, all international and cross-border health activities are bundled under the umbrella of the "Healthacross initiative". The initiative is part of the Health Agency of Lower Austria (NÖ Landesgesundheitsagentur), which operates and manages all 27 hospitals and around 50 care/nursing homes in the region. Via the "Healthacross initiative", Lower Austria is participating in four transnational networks and since 2008, conducted eight EU co-funded projects in cross-border healthcare, four of them currently running, as the following figure shows:



The projects are carried out within the accompanying INTERREG programmes to improve the health and quality of life for citizens living in border regions with one overarching goal: equal access to quality healthcare for citizens close to their home. The WHO Europe dedicated in 2018 a separate publication to Lower Austria's efforts in cross-border healthcare, namely, "[The Healthacross Initiative: How Lower Austria is boosting cross-border collaboration in health](#)".

Current projects & activities:

- **First European cross-border healthcare centre**

Gmünd - České Velenice, a city formerly divided by the iron curtain, is the starting point for all cross-border healthcare activities in Lower Austria. For Czech citizens, it is now part of their everyday life to receive outpatient treatment in the hospital in Gmünd (see below). In this very moment, the first European cross-border healthcare centre is being built at this border. After completion in autumn 2021, it will be possible for both Austrian and Czech doctors to treat Austrian and Czech patients in the extramural area. The healthcare centre will be named "Healthacross Gesundheitszentrum Gmünd).

- **"Healthacross for future"**

The "Healthacross for future" project is the third follow-up project carried out within the INTERREG Austria – Czech Republic programme between



Lower Austria and South Bohemia. The previous project "Healthacross in practice" enabled Czech patients from the border region to receive outpatient treatment at the hospital Gmünd in Austria. This project allowed 50 Czech patients to receive inpatient treatment in the hospital of Gmünd and included the planning of the cross-border healthcare centre above. Moreover, future possibilities of financing and payment mechanisms were examined. This "Healthacross" project series gave its name to the entire initiative.

- **"Gemeinsam Grenzenlos Gesund" (Unlimited Health Together)**

In the INTERREG V-A Austria – Czech Republic project "Unlimited Health Together" both an



endometriosis centre has been established in the hospital of Melk through knowledge transfer from the Czech hospital Znojmo and radiotherapy was made accessible for Austrian patients in the hospital of Znojmo. So far, more than 300 women received endometriosis treatment in the hospital of Melk and for 25 women the desire to have children could be fulfilled.

- **„Bridges for Birth“**

In the border region between Lower Austria and Slovakia, it is the aim of the INTERREG V-



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A Slovakia-Austria project “Bridges for Birth” to strengthen the healthcare for the youngest and most vulnerable members of our society: newborn babies. A cooperation in the field of Neonatology has been set up between the hospital of Hainburg (AT) and the National Institute for Children’s Disease Bratislava (SK). A distance of only 16 km separates these two hospitals and in case of a neonatal emergency in Austria it will be possible to safely transfer the baby to Bratislava. Therefore, not only the national border will be crossed, but also the border in our minds will be moved.

- **„HEAL NOW“**

The project "HEAL NOW" between Lower Austria and Hungary, which was launched in January 2020, has proven that, despite the epidemiological



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situation around COVID-19, cross-border digital cooperation in the healthcare sector is unstoppable. Together with the University Hospital Erzsébet Sopron (HU), the Hospital of Wiener Neustadt (AT) is equipping itself in the field of Digital Pathology to cooperate and network in a research platform, thus enabling early detection of tumor diseases and shortening the time to diagnosis in a life-saving way for patients.

- **Transnational Networks**

Via the “Healthacross initiative”, Lower Austria is part in four European/International networks, to strengthen the regional voice in EU health policy:

- [EUREGHA](#) (Vice-Chair)
- [WHO Regions for Health \(RHN\) Network](#)
- [euPREVENT](#)
- [Euregio Danube-Vltava \(EDM\)](#)

Future activities:

Regions 4 Health

"Regions 4 Health" is a first innovative attempt from Lower Austria to unite the entire border region between Lower Austria and the neighbouring Member States Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary in the field of health. This includes the regions Lower Austria (AT), South Bohemia, South Moravia, Vysočina (CZ), Bratislava, Trnava (SK) and West Transdanubia (HU).

The aim of this partnership is the cross-border coordination on current topics in the field of health as well as the establishment of additional cooperation to improve the health and well-being of citizens living in border regions.

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