Europe’s plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance
The success stories and challenges
The growing threat of antimicrobial resistance

Over the past 75 years, antimicrobial drugs have been relied upon to treat and prevent infections caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites. Antibiotics and other antimicrobials help to save patients from life-threatening diseases and allow surgeries to be performed safely. However, as bacteria evolve abilities to survive drugs intended to stop their growth or kill them, these drugs are losing their power. Meanwhile no new classes of antibiotics have been brought to market for more than 25 years. This has led to one of the biggest global public health threats: antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

What is Europe doing?

In light of the increased risk posed by AMR, the European Commission (EC) developed an Action Plan (2011-2016), which identified objectives and related measures to be implemented by 2016 to address the problem. The Action Plan took a holistic approach to AMR, focusing on human health and animal health issues, and to a lesser extent, environmental issues. It addressed the problem of AMR at a European Union (EU) level, including appropriate use of antimicrobials, infection prevention, and the development of new antimicrobials, alternative treatments and diagnostic tools.

The Action Plan also included actions to improve the monitoring and surveillance of AMR and use of antimicrobials in Europe. The objectives also covered international cooperation and communication, and education and training for health professionals and the general public.

RAND Europe was asked by the EC, Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) to carry out an evaluation of the EC’s AMR Action Plan between 2011 and 2015. The aim of the evaluation was to analyse whether the 12 strategic actions set out in the Action Plan were the most appropriate actions to combat AMR, and whether the plan fulfilled its core objectives.
Key findings

The Action Plan symbolised EU political commitment to AMR and helped to stimulate action in Europe and globally, especially through research funding, where it has made a major contribution to the AMR research landscape.

The Action Plan enabled:

- New EU policies to help address AMR in animal health, which included an animal health law, guidelines for the prudent use of antimicrobials in veterinary medicine and proposals on veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed;
- The enhancement of public–private collaboration, open data sharing and coordination of national AMR research efforts; and
- Some progress in national human health policies and performance related to AMR.

The Action Plan fully addressed most needs identified in relation to AMR, which included human health, animal health and welfare, food safety and research. The Action Plan could have been more coherent with EU environmental policy if it covered environmental issues more broadly.

The implementation of actions related to the Action Plan varied widely across EU member states.
Recommendations for further action against AMR

The EC should build on progress already made and continue to play an active role in the global fight against AMR through the following actions:

- Providing additional coordinated support to EU member states to encourage them to develop and implement their own national action plans on AMR.

- Expanding the scope of environmental action in the Action Plan to better understand the role of the environment in the transmission of AMR.

- Contributing further to international efforts through continuing to work with the World Health Organization in particular, and with other global bodies.

- Sustaining support for AMR research and innovation activities and considering the focus of the AMR research portfolio, particularly the balance between developing new treatments versus research on alternatives, vaccines, diagnostics, and social factors that impact antimicrobial usage.

- Expanding the monitoring of AMR and AMR-related activities, taking a more holistic, data-driven approach linking data on resistance to and usage of antimicrobials to prescribing trends and other factors, as well as improving the tracking of AMR expenditure, public awareness and how data is being used to tackle AMR.

- Improving communication with stakeholders and the wider public about activities related to the EU’s efforts to tackle AMR.

Conclusions about the EU’s AMR Action Plan

The EC’s AMR Action Plan has been successful at stimulating action to tackle AMR within member states, Europe and globally. As the threat of AMR continues to grow, it is important that the EU continues to play a leading role in addressing the problem, both within Europe and worldwide. There is still plenty of work to be done across the many different areas that will be affected by AMR, but the EC’s Action Plan has made a solid start and laid important foundations for further global action.