

EuropeActive revises strategic purpose for fitness industry as health provider

EuropeActive is finalising a strategic plan targeting 100 million fitness club members and a 20% penetration rate across Europe by 2030, with much stronger recognition for the sector as a health provider.

EuropeActive started working on the plans last year, to be unveiled at the European Health and Fitness Forum (EHFF) in April. But the health crisis clearly reinforced the case in favour of a strategic shift, to focus more on health and technology.

Andreas Paulsen, EuropeActive's executive director, said that this adjusted focus should help to reach the 100 million memberships, since it will help the industry to target wider consumer groups.

The plans should be supported by a permanent advisory group of chief executives, heading up fitness club operators that work across several European countries. EuropeActive is actively recruiting members of this President's Council.

The move will help the association to reinforce its annual budget, amounting to about €2 million. Paulsen said that EuropeActive is striving to raise that by at least 10% this year.

"We are uniting our sector's largest European operators behind EuropeActive's public affairs strategy, financing this remarkable long-term endeavor to align with public health and position our sector as important providers of physical, social, mental wellbeing in our communities," he said.

As part of the changes, the association wants to open up to more fitness technology firms and to create a permanent digital steering committee.

EuropeActive appears prepared to onboard a wider variety of members and partners as well. Under the previous management, there had been some discussions about partnerships in the food and beverage industry. EuropeActive acknowledges that nutrition is an integral part of health and fitness, but members should

clearly contribute to that.

The stronger association with health could certainly help to clarify the industry's economic and social value across Europe, and to potentially obtain support in areas such as value added tax.

In this context, it's one of the



Andreas Paulsen / EuropeActive

purposes of the strategic plan to reinforce EuropeActive as a source of data on the industry, and the science behind fitness as a health provider. It wants to develop existing resources into a full-fledged European research center for fitness and physical activity.

Paulsen said EuropeActive is talking with two potential partners to establish this data collection infrastructure over the coming years. It will probably test the use of some of their data for a report to be published by Deloitte at the end of September on the im-



European Health & Fitness Forum

pact of the health crisis on the fitness industry.

"We are following with great interest the work that UK Active has been doing with 4Global and other partners on the Data Hub project over the last couple of years," Paulsen said.

He adds that EuropeActive will move toward an indicator of market penetration that is more aligned with its purpose and the evolution of the ecosystem. Instead of just fitness club members, it would take

into account the consumers that are using fitness services through digital means, studios or aggregators.

Work on the strategic plans was reset after a management restructuring, with the departure of Nathalie Smeeman as executive director and Graham Watson as president.

David Stalker, Myzone's chief executive in Europe, the Middle East and Africa since last year, became EuropeActive's president in April, after several months as interim executive director. That function was taken over by Paulsen, who previously filled in as acting president. Both were appointed until April 2021, to stabilise the organisation.

Their efforts to reinforce ties with existing stakeholders have led to a restructuring of EuropeActive's team into four departments: Member Services, Educational Services, European Union & Public Affairs, and Projects & Programmes.

The fresh impetus has already created more purposeful collaboration with some of Europe's leading operators and national associations, to help the industry deal with the health crisis.

The priorities for the next years should be discussed at the adjusted version of the EHFF that will take place in Cologne on September 30 - with a streaming option.

EuropeActive has redefined its mission to state that it aims to "promote the interests of all organisations, which work towards getting more people more active more often."

The vision has been reformulated as well, underscoring that Europe Active wants to be "the leading European voice for the fitness, exercise and physical activity sector."

EuropeActive previously set a target of 80 million members for 2025. The industry was on course to reach that, with membership reaching 64.8 million at the end of last year, as reported in the European Health and Fitness Market Report by EuropeActive and Deloitte.

FITNESS NEWS EUROPE

FNE#107
June 24, 2020

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