

## LETTERS

## GREEK ECONOMIC CRISIS

## Effects of Greek economic crisis on health are real

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We were surprised by Liaropoulos's conclusions about the health effects of the Greek economic crisis.<sup>1</sup> His article contains several unreferenced assertions and contradictions, such as statements that there is "no evidence of denial of services to patients" yet "many [people] are without cover" and the church, non-governmental associations, and others are "rallying to help."

He suggests that our peer reviewed research published in the *Lancet*, which reported evidence of a Greek health crisis, used dated information.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it used the most up to date data at the time, which were collected two years into the crisis. The health effects have been confirmed by Greek academics using 2011 data.<sup>3</sup> His claim of "no evidence that [the economic crisis] has affected health" is at odds with the doubling in the prevalence of depression,<sup>4</sup> while Eurostat data also show dramatic increases in unmet medical need and infant mortality.

Nor does he refer to the 2011 reports of increased infectious diseases, such as the large rise in HIV among injecting drug users, associated with budget cuts including closure of needle exchange services,<sup>5</sup> or the re-emergence of malaria (for the first time since 1974) associated with cuts to mosquito spraying in the south of the country. Liaropoulos dismisses some evidence

of harm as "anecdotal" but fails to mention that investigative journalists had to fill the gap left by the European authorities' failure to monitor the full health effects of the measures they are imposing. We do not dispute that the Greek health system has long needed reforming, but reform should be informed by data on the health needs of the population.

Competing interests: None declared.

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