



## PRESS RELEASE

12 December 2022

COMMUNICATION TO THE  
SENATE SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

### FRENCH PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY: EXTENDED MISSIONS, A STRATEGY TO BE BETTER DEFINED

Inspired by the British model when it was created in 2016, the French Public Health Agency (Santé Publique France - SPF) is an agency under the Ministry of Health. It was created from the merger of four organisations to improve the coherence and efficiency of public policies in the fields of epidemiological observation, health monitoring, preparation and response to health emergencies and crises, prevention and health promotion. In its report responding to a request from the Senate Social Affairs Committee, the Court of Accounts examined the way in which the agency has carried out its missions since 2016, the strategy it has implemented in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and its administrative management. While SPF was a key player in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular in the management of strategic stocks, the Court identified weaknesses in its management and positioning and makes recommendations to address these.

#### ***A continuum of missions being consolidated***

Between 2016 and 2019, SPF has started to strengthen the links between its missions, at the cost of lengthy internal reorganisations and a reconciliation of IT systems. However, the expected synergies had not yet been fully realised by the time the Covid pandemic hit in early 2020. The health crisis has changed the conditions under which these missions are carried out. The agency was able to demonstrate responsiveness and flexibility in its organisation to meet the urgent needs of the crisis management. The strategic stocks, which SPF builds up at the request of the State, have completely changed dimension, with in particular a significant accumulation of personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, overcoats). It is up to the Ministry of Health to decide on the desirable level of these stocks and on the amount of funding that corresponds to them. The crisis highlighted weaknesses in surveillance systems which have been at least partially remedied with the implementation of a tool such as SIDEPA and the conduct of current projects aimed in particular at better identification of viruses and their variants. While fields such as mental health were poorly covered before 2020, actions in the field of prevention and health promotion have been consolidated and diversified, thanks to a continuous increase in budgetary appropriations dedicated to this policy. Lastly, the health reserve, which allows health professionals to be mobilised to make up for certain shortcomings in the health care system, has been overtaken by the scale of the health crisis and must be rethought from an interministerial perspective and according to a renewed employment framework.

## **Management that can be improved**

From 2016 to the onset of the crisis, SPF's budget was increased but its staffing levels decreased, although less than for other health agencies. While the wage bill has been kept under control overall, there are factors of increase - amplified during the health crisis - that need to be monitored. SPF must also implement job and career management. Lastly, despite the importance of the challenges and shortcomings identified before 2016, the insufficient prioritisation of projects and structural underinvestment in information systems have penalised the implementation of all the missions; the modernisation of these information systems now represents a major challenge for the agency.

## **A strategy that needs to be clarified, linked to the scheduling of works and prioritised**


In the objectives and performance contract between the agency and the Ministry of Health, the expectations regarding management and steering efficiency were not accompanied by any quantified objective, even though this was one of the reasons for creating SPF. The agency has drawn up a multi-annual programme and, up to 2020, almost thirty programmes containing numerous projects, without any management tools or formalised processes to ensure their correct implementation. Since 2020, the agency has refocused its scheduling around six more cross-departmental "issues": the ongoing clarification of action priorities must now be refined, accompanied by quantified estimates of the resources allocated and correlated with the objectives and performance contract. The board of directors, which has not been very active on strategic issues, needs to play a more assertive role in guiding the agency's strategy.

## **Expertise to be further mobilised**

In addition to its scheduled activities, SPF has to deal with numerous referrals, mainly from the Ministry of Health and the ARS, the follow-up of which can still be improved. Since its creation, SPF's expertise has been underused by the Ministry of Health, which often favours other bodies - in particular the High Council for Public Health. In addition, the creation of several *ad hoc* structures during the pandemic contributed to the agency's own expertise being overshadowed. Nevertheless, the health crisis has given it a higher profile through the production of surveillance data, its participation in communication campaigns and now in European projects in which SPF is actively involved.

**[Read the report](#)**

### **PRESS CONTACT:**

**Julie Poissier** ■ Head of Press Relations ■ T +33 (0)1 42 98 97 43 ■ +33 (0)6 87 36 52 21 ■ [julie.poissier@ccomptes.fr](mailto:julie.poissier@ccomptes.fr)  
 @Courdescomptes  ccomptes  Court of Accounts  Court of Accounts