

## Press release

Zurich, June 8, 2022

### **Great recognition for Altea Long COVID Network by GDK and WHO**

**The Conference of Cantonal Directors of Public Health (GDK) recommends that the cantons support the Altea Long COVID platform, and various cantons have already agreed to do so. The World Health Organization (WHO) has now recognized Altea as an example of innovative and accurate science communication.**

Since the return to normal according to the Epidemics Act, healthcare and, to a certain extent, prevention have been the responsibility of the cantons. This also includes measures related to the long-term effects of COVID-19 (Long COVID).

A survey conducted by the FOPH and the GDK among the cantons identified the following challenges with regard to Long COVID: lack of knowledge about the problem, lack of availability of centralized and accessible information, lack of networking and coordination of services for those affected. The GDK Board believes that [Altea](#) can help overcome these challenges and therefore recommends that the cantons support the network. This decision was taken at the GDK Board meeting in May.

#### **Numerous cantons on board**

Various cantons have already pledged their support, and the recognition by the GDK is extremely valuable to Altea. “It’s a great vote of confidence from the GDK, recognizing the importance and the quality of Altea,” says Michael Schlunegger, President of the Altea Long COVID Network Association and Managing Director of LUNGE ZÜRICH. This means that Altea’s work is recognized not only at the national level by the FOPH but also at the cantonal level. “We hope that the cantons will follow the recommendation, and that we, as a society, can tackle Long COVID together,” says Schlunegger.

#### **Acknowledgement by WHO**

Altea’s innovative nature and quality have also been recognized at the international level – Altea is one of 20 initiatives worldwide that have been highlighted by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an example of innovation and good practice in science communication. The WHO team evaluated the criteria of (1) scientific accuracy, (2) innovation factor, (3) consideration of gender, equality, and human rights aspects, and (4) evaluation of their impact (see the [WHO article](#), a [compilation](#) of the projects highlighted, and a [case study](#) of Altea).

### **About Altea**

Since April 2021, Altea has been offering a platform for exchange on the new syndrome of Long COVID. Altea is a meeting place for those affected and their relatives, medical professionals, researchers, and other interested parties. The goal of Altea is to improve the quality of life of those affected and facilitate the exchange of information among all of those involved. Altea is available in the Swiss national languages of German, French, and Italian, as well as in English.

### **What does Altea offer?**

Altea was created in spring 2021 by [LUNGE ZÜRICH](#) to improve the quality of life of those affected by Long COVID. It consists of the following elements, among others:

- the [Vademecum](#) with evidence-based support for dealing with the symptoms
- the [Directory](#) of points of contact offering services related to Long COVID
- the [Forum](#), in which those affected and their relatives, medical professionals, and researchers can exchange information (protected area, login required)
- the [blog](#), covering the latest developments in science and medicine, as well as politics, law, and society
- the [stories](#), in which those affected can relate their experiences and give the illness a face

The content of Altea is created in collaboration with an [Expert Board](#) of members from various specialist medical fields.

Altea functions as a “co-creation” hub that brings together those affected with the worlds of medicine and science, as well as other stakeholders. “Co-creation” means that experiences, inputs, suggestions, and ideas from the various stakeholders are central to the functioning and ongoing development of the platform. The rolling development approach was chosen for another reason: the immense suffering of those affected. Some of them have been experiencing serious adverse effects for more than a year.

The operation of Altea was transferred to the independent Altea Long COVID Network Association in fall 2021. The name Altea is derived from the Greek Althaíā or the Latin Althaea, and means “the one who heals” or “the one who cares”.

### **Long COVID syndrome – what do we know?**

The World Health Organization (WHO) published the first official clinical definition on October 6, 2021. WHO refers to a “post COVID-19 condition”, while, in other contexts, the term “Long COVID” has become established. Both examples refer to the same syndrome: when a person with suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection experiences symptoms within three months following infection, these symptoms persist for at least two months and they cannot be explained by other causes. The many symptoms include shortness of breath, chronic fatigue, concentration and memory problems, and joint and muscle pain.

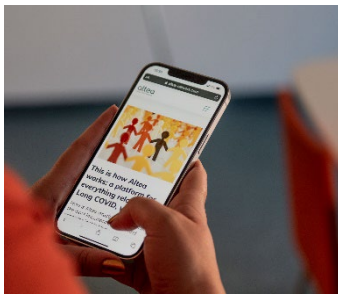
Long COVID can affect anyone, not just members of at-risk groups or patients with severe COVID-19. Even young, healthy people (including children) can suddenly experience some severe symptoms following infection. According to current studies, tens of thousands of people in Switzerland are affected by mild to severe long-term effects. The [FOPH literature screening](#)

[report](#) anticipates long-term implications for those affected, the healthcare system, and the economy.

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### Photo material

The related photo material is available to [download](#).



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