

John Dalli

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health and Consumer Policy

Commissioner Dalli delivers speech on "Investing in health in times of crisis"

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John DALLI, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, attends the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) Annual Conference

Brussels, Belgium, 06 June 2012

**COMMISSIONER DALLI'S PARTICIPATION AT THE
EUROPEAN PUBLIC HEALTH ALLIANCE (EPHA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

WEDNESDAY 6 JUNE 2012, 16:30HRS

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE (EESC)

RUE VAN MAERLANT 2

BRUSSELS

SPEECH

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today, to speak about the pressing issue of "investing in health in times of crisis".

First let me thank the European Public Health Alliance for bringing us together today; and for its strong support over the years in taking forward EU health policy.

The Alliance has contributed greatly to bringing EU health policy to where it stands now, by co-ordinating the NGO community, advocating public health and promoting health objectives across EU policies.

As you know, I believe that health is a long term investment. People's health is a key asset for society and for the economy as a whole.

The Healthcare sector is a key job creator and a driver of innovation and technology. As such, Health systems have an important role in achieving the Europe 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

This is why cutting back on healthcare delivery is invariably a false economy, triggering worsening outcomes in the longer term – for people's health, for health systems, for society and the economy as a whole.

Yet, at the same time, we have to recognize that, in order to ensure that our children and our children's children continue to enjoy a high level of health, we need to ensure that our systems are sustainable.

We also need to recognize that there are ways in which we can build efficiency into today's health systems. It is not about spending more money, but about spending our money better and more wisely; and cutting costs where efficiencies can be found.

What Europe needs now is to deliver more and better healthcare within sustainable health budgets.

It is in this spirit that - I am informed - you have spent a very productive day here discussing solutions to cope with financial austerity.

I am pleased to hear that you have looked at the "financial turmoil as an impetus for change". I am convinced that difficult times can indeed provide an incentive to think creatively and push forward in-depth reforms.

We need to contain costs, while building modern, responsive, and sustainable health systems fit for the future.

Health needs to be fully reflected within the broad policy agendas of Member States and their National Reform plans in the framework of Europe 2020.

Against this background, the Council has launched a reflection process to identify effective ways of investing in health – to pursue modern, responsive and sustainable health systems.

Supporting the reflection process, the Commission is setting up a panel of independent experts; who can provide independent, tailor made advice to Member States on how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their health systems.

The Commission is already assisting Member States to pursue the sustainability of health systems under economic adjustment programmes. For example, the Commission has agreed with Greece and Portugal a list of targets and measures to improve the sustainability of their health systems.

These include, for example, the rationalisation of pharmaceutical expenditure and the improvement of management practices.

I am persuaded that all Member States need to increase cost-effectiveness in healthcare and work together to find better innovative models to address the new challenges.

One way to do this is through the use of Health Technology Assessment – a means of sharing knowledge on the effectiveness of treatments, enabling decision makers to make optimal choices.

I strongly support HTA co-operation in Europe. Limited resources could be better used if work-sharing and re-using HTA information were to be increased.

Another way to promote sustainability is eHealth. Many Member States and regions are putting in place a range of eHealth solutions.

It is important that while doing so, they do not reinvent the wheel or develop solutions which are incompatible with other solutions in the same country or in another Member State.

We need interoperable systems that improve safety and quality of care for patients, at home and in cross border situations.

This is why I have just brought together last month a new eHealth Network to improve cooperation between all Member States in this area, as foreseen in the Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare.

The Network will foster a mutual learning process and promote interoperability. I am persuaded that this network will greatly contribute to breaking down the legal and practical barriers currently hampering the uptake of eHealth.

The European Commission is increasingly channelling Health Programme money to support Member States in pursuing innovation, efficiency and sustainability in health.

Between 2008 and the end of this year, the current Health programme will have invested close to 23 million to finance projects in this area.

The Commission's proposal for the new Health Programme post 2014 puts support to innovative and sustainable health systems as the number one objective of the programme. This includes actions for example on Health Technology Assessment, eHealth and the health workforce.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have spoken about some possible solutions to foster sustainability in our times of crisis.

The crisis, however, has simply magnified the need for sustainability which has been there all along and growing by the day; as people are living longer and longer and demand for healthcare is rising.

Indeed, healthcare expenditure across the EU is projected to increase by one quarter by 2060 just on account of ageing.

Against this background, the Commission launched last year the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing – a stakeholder-driven approach to support innovation throughout the entire innovation cycle and across health and care sectors.

New challenges call for new approaches and new solutions.

By working in partnership, smart and innovative solutions can find their way more easily to the market and turn the challenge of ageing into a positive opportunity, and healthcare expenses into sound investments.

Last November, the Partnership's Steering Group set the framework by adopting a Strategic Implementation Plan. Commission reacted in April this year with a Communication spelling out its commitments toward taking forward the strategy.

The Partnership has identified priority areas on which to focus. Stakeholders are invited to join and build the critical mass for innovative, user-centric, efficient as well as sustainable active and healthy ageing solutions.

The deadline to submit commitments and reference sites was 31 May. And I can tell you that the level of interest was even higher than we expected! We received more than 250 commitments and more than 50 reference sites.

Our action does not stop here.

Allow me to take this opportunity to mention two legislative reviews which seek to foster innovation and ensure safety in health systems.

We are currently shaping a proposal to revise the Clinical Trials Directive, which we aim to adopt before the summer.

This aims to make Europe more attractive for clinical research by facilitating multi-national approaches.

We also plan to present proposals to strengthen EU regulations on Medical Devices later this year.

This will seek to ensure that the rules on market access and market control are further tightened and revised in light of experience gained recently from the PIP fraud. The review will also improve harmonised application and enforcement access therein, for example in accrediting and supervising Notified Bodies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by saying that the European Public Health Alliance plays a particularly important role in our joint efforts to place health high on agenda, and to mainstream health into the economic governance process and cohesion policy.

I thank you for your support, and look forward to our continued fruitful co-operation in future.

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