

John Dalli

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

Commissioner Dalli delivers speech on the 'Ageing, Health and Pensions' report

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

John DALLI, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, attends the publication launch of Forward Look "Ageing, Health and Pensions in Europe"

Brussels, 26 November 2010

ESF LAUNCH EVENT FOR "AGEING, HEALTH AND PENSIONS" REPORT

FRIDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2010, 14:40-17:00 HRS

NETH-ER, AARLENSTRAAT 22, 1050 BRUSSELS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, let me congratulate the European Science Foundation for its work on "Ageing, Health and Pensions in Europe".

This morning I and Vice President Kroes launched the Innovation Partnership on Healthy Active Ageing. The response, interest and sense of commitment shown by those who attended from all related sectors was overwhelming. As was the sense of urgency that underlined the meeting. We need a different mindset. We need to reform, restructure and reorganise our social model.

Europeans are living longer than ever before; and are expected to live longer and longer.

Today, 1 in every 6 citizens is aged 65 or over. In less than 50 years time, almost 1 in every 3 citizens will be 65 or over.

This is good news and it shows we have made great progress in the field of health.

But this trend will also bring profound changes to society as we know it:

- how we look at older people and their role in society; what we consider working age or a "normal working day"; the role of formal and informal care;
- how we organise healthcare to meet the needs of the elderly; and support healthy living for healthy ageing;
- how we encourage innovative ways to support the elderly.

All this - and much more – are the issues we need to look at to prepare our societies for the ageing revolution.

And this is precisely what I appreciate in the work of the European Science Foundation – it looks at all these things together in a holistic manner, across the traditional boundaries of policies.

Let me focus on how I see the ageing challenge and the possible solutions.

With ageing, demand for health services and long-term care is likely to grow; at the same time there will be fewer people working.

This raises challenges for healthcare systems, which are under growing pressure to adapt to the needs of an ageing population, while remaining financially sustainable.

I believe people's health is a key economic driver.

The state of people's health makes all the difference between their needing healthcare or not; between their being able to work or not; between their needing a pension early in life or not.

A population ageing in bad health means lower quality of life for our citizens, more healthcare and social costs; and a smaller workforce with many people unable to work because of health problems.

On the contrary, people ageing in good health need less healthcare, and can continue contributing to society as they grow older. Hence my emphasis not only on healthy ageing but ACTIVE and healthy ageing.

For me the key question is therefore what can we do to help citizens age in good health; and live independent active lives?

I believe we need to focus on promotion of good health and prevention of avoidable diseases; and on innovation for healthy ageing.

Let me say a few words on prevention.

Many of the chronic diseases that older people suffer from are avoidable. They are linked with what people eat, drink, whether or not they smoke or exercise throughout their lives.

This is why I believe we need to focus much more on encouraging healthy choices: a healthy diet, physical exercise, and no smoking.

For example, if we discourage today's young people from smoking, tomorrow's elderly citizens will suffer less from tobacco related diseases.

I believe research and action should focus on "adding life to years". On helping people live healthier.

But we must also not lose sight of the fact that healthy people, no matter what age, have a role in staying active and contributing to society.

Here the report on "Ageing, Health and Pensions" makes a valuable contribution.

Not only does it set out a roadmap towards a better understanding of how age and health are interlinked; it also bridges gaps between academics, business and policy.

Furthermore, the report points to areas where increased cross-border co-operation in research can bring added value to all.

This is of specific interest to European health systems, which are diverse in their organisation, though united in their shared values of access to good quality care, of equity and of solidarity.

Indeed, we need to understand better how health systems will need to respond to the needs of an ageing population, for example, to focus more on chronic diseases, palliative care and long term care.

I also note with interest that your report calls for EU-level co-ordination in the field of data collection and data access for easier and quicker transfer of information. I agree. Indeed we need to base our policy decisions on solid data.

Your report further calls for a European research network on ageing, as well as for a European forum for exchange of knowledge between academics, business and public policy.

I am delighted to say that the Commission is already working on an initiative that responds to this call – and to which you can contribute.

Just last month, the Commission adopted a Communication on the Innovation Union as a key initiative under our overall strategy "Europe 2020".

In this context, the European Commission will foster European Innovation Partnerships to tackle societal challenges through innovation.

The idea is to bring together private and public sector; at EU, national, regional and local levels; to speed up the process of turning innovations into products and services.

I am pleased to announce that the first such Innovation Partnership will address the challenge of Active and Healthy Ageing.

I strongly believe innovation is key to addressing ageing.

Innovative applications can help the elderly live independently; can enable routine medical checks to be done from home; making it more comfortable for elderly patients, and saving doctors time and hospital resources; innovation can also increase healthcare productivity and contribute to sustainability.

In this context, the Innovation Partnership will pursue three objectives:

First, to help EU citizens lead healthy, active and independent lives while growing older; the partnership will aim at delivering concrete and pragmatic solutions to our citizens;

Second, to improve the sustainability and efficiency of more integrated social and healthcare systems; and

Third, to develop and deploy innovative products, devices and services geared to the needs of the elderly. This new "grey economy" of products shaped to the needs of the elderly will also create new businesses opportunities.

The overall goal of the Innovation Partnership is to increase the average healthy lifespan by two years by 2020.

To achieve this goal, we have to work together: researchers and academics; civil society including patient groups; industry representatives for example from the pharmaceutical industry; and decision-makers at local, regional, national and European level.

And this is why, this morning, I met with a wide range of stakeholders to encourage them to participate in the Active and Healthy Ageing Innovation Partnership and to listen to their ideas.

I have also just launched a public consultation, to prepare the ground for commitment and involvement in the Partnership.

With this consultation, I would like stakeholders to help us map existing national, regional and local initiatives and instruments on healthy ageing; and to put forward ideas for active and healthy ageing solutions that can impact on elderly citizens, healthcare systems, and markets.

Indeed, we are not starting from scratch. My aim is to build on progress made so far to develop effective and pragmatic European wide actions with synergies across sectors and different levels of governance.

Your contribution in terms of research priorities will be most valuable. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to invite you to share with me your ideas for future action and to work with my services in the context of this Innovation Partnership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe has been discussing the challenges of ageing for years. The time has now come to move from words into action.

As your report rightly underlines, successful ageing calls for close co-operation amongst various policies and various players dealing with a wide range of issues

including employment, pensions, and health and social care.

The European Commission is committed to doing its share and to bringing on board the valuable contributions of organisations such as yours.

This is why both Commissioner Andor and myself are here with you today and working together to tackle ageing. 2012 will be the European Year for Active Ageing – as Commissioner Andor mentioned.

And 2011 will be the year when the Innovative partnership on Healthy and Active ageing will take off.

I hope we can explore these issues together, and shape together action to foster healthy ageing.

Thank you.