



## **CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE "EU 2020" STRATEGY**

### **Comments from the European Union Geriatric Medicine Society**

On behalf of the European Union Geriatric Medicine Society, we write to welcome the Commission's initiative to develop a new EU vision, to ensure appropriate follow up of the Lisbon Strategy and Action Programme.

As you may be aware, geriatric medicine is the medical specialisation for health related problems in older people, including acute, chronic and rehabilitation problems, delivered in the community as well as in institutional and hospital settings. It addresses the management of multi-system and multi-organ diseases, underlines the need for tailored and safe prescription of medicines, is multidisciplinary and aims to intervene at the lowest possible level of intervention and care.

The EUGMS encompasses all the National Societies of geriatric medicine experts in the European Union and EFTA countries. In total this comprises 15,000 doctors whose main activity is the specialist care of older people.

We particularly appreciate the fact that the Commission is explicitly engaging with EU citizens and their representative organizations as part of the process to develop the EU2020 strategy. This consultation provides EUGMS with a welcome opportunity to share our thoughts on this matter.

The EU 2020 background paper provides a framework for a new social and economic strategy for the EU, and the key word seems to be 'growth'. This is of course highly relevant in view of the current economic crisis and its devastating effects on economies and individuals. While there is light at the end of the tunnel, and while the crisis seems to be lifting slightly, its impact on employment and social inclusion will be felt for the foreseeable future. Therefore, an EU initiative, aiming to develop a sound basis for a comprehensive and positive strategy, taking into account the most relevant societal challenges, provides a positive signal to Member States and EU citizens.

The background paper highlights three main drivers for change towards achieving a sustainable, green and social market economy:

- Creating value by basing growth on knowledge
- Empowering people in inclusive societies
- Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy.

While important, the drivers as described do not seem to cover all the dimensions that play a part in creating sustainable and inclusive societies. If a future strategy is

to result in competitive and dynamic economies, flourishing and inclusive labour markets and sustainable social security systems, there are other issues that will need to be taken into account, such as

- ✓ appropriate ways of addressing the many challenges posed by the ageing of society, and
- ✓ health, illness prevention and access to treatment and care across the life span.

In relation to the first, it is disappointing to note that the paper only refers to the ageing of society on two occasions i.e.:

*'The crisis has exacerbated the long-term social challenges Europe faces today, such as... social exclusion and child poverty, and solidarity between generations in the context of an ageing society. In order to meet these challenges, employment rates of both men and women will have to rise rapidly and social protection systems will have to be modernized.'*

and

*'Modern social security and pension systems, adapted to the crisis and to the ageing of the European population, will be needed to provide an adequate level of income support and coverage to those temporarily out of work.'*

Both these references essentially focus on the same issue, i.e. the need to boost employment rates in order to ensure sustainable social security systems.

While relevant, this approach seems a little one-sided: it does not do justice to the profound challenges which are already occurring as a result of societal ageing. For instance, the need to ensure participation and integration of older people (including older workers), the need to combat wide-spread age discrimination – especially with a view to the labour market but also in terms of access to services especially with a view to the labour market but also in terms of access to services and evidence based drug therapies - and the need to put in place specific measures to facilitate inclusion of older people are not taken into account. Furthermore, changes required in terms of goods and (access to) services (more specifically health services), and the potential positive role and contribution of older people are not part of the picture. The relation between longevity and economic growth is complex, with some linking increased longevity with economic growth—the "demographic dividend." One calculation of this dividend is that cumulative gains in life expectancy after 1900 were worth over \$1.2m to the representative American in 2000, whereas gains after 1970 added about \$3.2 trillion a year to national wealth, equal to about half of gross domestic product<sup>1</sup>.

In short, a comprehensive view to ensure a sustainable society for all ages by effective integration and intergenerational solidarity seems to be lacking.

Secondly, if 'growth' is indeed the key word for a future strategy, and if dynamic and thriving labour markets are to be developed, there should also be reference to ensuring a healthy population across the life span: a healthy population (and a healthy workforce) is a precondition for the success of a future EU strategy. This was indeed recognized by the Lisbon Strategy, which included 'Healthy Life Years' as

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<sup>1</sup> Murphy KM, Topel RH. The value of health and longevity. *J Political Econ* 2006;114:871-904

one of the indicators of success. It would seem logical for EU2020 to take over this notion.

EUGMS maintains that prevention in the widest sense should be an explicit part of the strategy. Primary prevention and health promotion (including vaccination) are of course important in this respect; secondary prevention (appropriate and timely treatment) and tertiary prevention (high quality and personalized care) are also key. In addition, EUGMS therefore believes that improved, across-the-board access to specialized geriatric care could make an enormous contribution to both the quality of life of older people and their carers as well as to the sustainability and efficacy of health care systems.

In conclusion, we would like to underline that, over the course of recent years, the Commission has made enormous progress in addressing health issues. While we are aware that the ultimate responsibility for the organization, financing and delivery of health and medical care lies with member state governments, we do feel that the EU has a role to play. If the success of EU2020 will ultimately lie in the quality of life of individuals, then health issues should be a part of this wider vision.

As the Commission has highlighted on many occasions, Health = Wealth and the current overarching EU health strategy should be an integrated part of EU2020.

Lastly, EUGMS would like to recommend continuous monitoring of the implementation and output of 'EU2020', as well as the establishment of a clear framework for cooperation with stakeholders. This will guarantee the relevance, efficiency and outcome of the strategy.