



## NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNITY

### *Position Paper*

## Response to the Commission Consultation on the Future EU 2020 Strategy

December 2009

This consultation response is supported by: representatives working on public health within the North West of England region, in particular, primary care trusts, local authorities, NHS trusts and wider health organisations. We as the North West of England health community also support the response submitted by Eurohealthnet.

### 1. The North West of England

The North West of England is a diverse region with a population of over 7 million people, the third most populated English Government Office region behind the South East and London. The region as a whole accounts for over 11 per cent of employment and over 10 per cent of United Kingdom GDP. The North West has five distinctive sub-regions, Cheshire, Merseyside, Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

The North West of England Public Health Community has a history of European engagement, having responded to many EU consultations where public health and health systems have a role to play, including, most recently: the 'Adapting to Climate Change' consultation in November 2007; the Consultation on 'Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe' in April 2008; DG SANCO Annual Work Plan 2009 in September 2008; the initial 'Future of Transport' consultation and the 'European Health Workforce' consultation in March 2009; the 'Health Inequalities' consultation in April 2009 and the second "Future of Transport" communication in September 2009.

### 2. General Comments

The North West of England public health community appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the future EU 2020 strategy. We believe that this strategy has the potential to contribute positively to the health needs and challenges facing EU citizens. Many of the principle challenges facing citizens in the coming decades will be related to their health, with obesity, cancers, cardiovascular disease, mental illness, climate change, health inequalities and access to services amongst the top challenges. These challenges to health also represent challenges to economic prosperity. The good health of EU citizens is essential in achieving the overarching goals and policy objectives of the EU, both now and in future decades and, if properly prioritised, the EU 2020 strategy has a vital role to play in this.

#### **Key message:**

Health and wellbeing are underpinning factors of economic prosperity and should be recognised as such.

The consultation document highlights the need to ensure that social, economic and environmental objectives go hand in hand if this new strategy is to deliver a smarter, greener sustainable economy. It also highlights the need to put people and responsibility first.

The concept of WELLBEING cuts across all of these areas and the incorporation of WELLBEING into the core of the 2020 strategy would increase the chances of delivering a truly sustainable, responsible economy which places equal value on the social, environmental and economic agendas. Developing an economic strategy which has wellbeing as its core objective would also help the European Union meet its obligations under the Lisbon treaty to promote the "wellbeing of its people" (article 3), to "eliminate inequalities" (article 8) and to ensure that EU policies contribute towards improving public health (article 168).



## General

The cost of poor health, both in the aging population and in the working age population has the potential to be crippling to the European economy. Conversely, health has a very important role to play in helping Europe achieve its full potential for prosperity and solidarity, as recognised in the 2009 social protection committee report evaluating the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy, which states *“good health contributes to economic prosperity through improving labour market participation and improving productivity as well as increasing participation in other societal activities.”*

Health inequalities across the EU have significant economic implications. In the background document to the EC Communication **‘Solidarity in Health: Reducing Health Inequalities in the EU’**, when health is valued as a capital good, inequalities related losses have been estimated to cost around €141 billion in 2004 or 1.4% of GDP. Citizens’ health and wellbeing should be recognised as one of the key solutions to the various challenges facing Europe. EU spending and priorities should therefore give particular attention to promoting public good in these areas.

The consultation document recognises the challenges of demographic change and other long term social issues faced by Europe today, such as child poverty, integration of migrant populations, social exclusion and inter-generational solidarity. These same challenges to economic prosperity are also challenges for the local, regional and national health systems of Europe and reflect the ongoing underlying challenge of significant health inequalities across the community.

The current crisis clearly shows the need to nurture resilience and to raise the capacity of society as a whole to adapt and innovate in times of economic downturn or recession. We therefore endorse the Commission’s themed approach as set out in the consultation document, given that many important, cross cutting issues such as climate change, wellbeing and social inclusion cannot be addressed in silos. It is essential that any future EC action builds on and contributes to the important ‘Health in All Policies’ approach (HiAP), specifically prioritised in the EU Health Strategy “Together for Health” and 2006 ministerial conclusions. In addition the EU should establish common approaches and methodologies to undertaking economic analysis that incorporate health and health equity.

We urge the Commission not to miss the opportunity created by the economic crisis to adopt a long term and different approach to economic policy, which involves significant change in producer and consumer behaviour. It is essential to ensure that economic, competitive and growth orientations do not become objectives in themselves but contribute to achieving the Union’s overall aim “to promote peace, its values and the wellbeing of its people.” The public appetite for change is there and Europe’s decision makers have a responsibility to ensure that a new economic model is put in place which has the long term wellbeing of all citizens, rather than the short term economic benefit of a few, at its heart. By placing wellbeing at the centre of economic strategy a fairer and more sustainable future for all can be achieved.

The consultation document proposes 3 key drivers for EU 2020, which we will now comment on individually:

### Creating value by basing growth on knowledge

The consultation document clearly states the necessity of “Recognising the constraints and facing new challenges.” We support the view that cutting spending in areas such as research and education would be counter-productive to the development of a sustainable economy and society. However, in financially challenging times it is also imperative that investment of public funds shows real benefits and return on investment. Therefore, robust frameworks should be developed to ensure that results of European research are translated into concrete, practical actions, products and policy solutions across society. It is also important to recognise that in some areas (such as health research and public health improvement) the financial benefits may often be seen over generations, rather than over months or years, which is why we support the approach of developing a long term strategy for a sustainable future.

More effective translation of research into products and services represents a real opportunity for the development of SMEs and creation of jobs. Member states, regions and municipalities should work together to



identify gaps in knowledge and gaps in the products/services market that will need to be filled in order for Europe to achieve a sustainable, prosperous future for its citizens. For example, there are currently gaps in the areas of health systems and healthcare technologies which it will be vital to address as Europe struggles to cope with the health demands of an aging population with a decreasing health workforce. The regional and local levels should be key partners in this debate as it is at this level that healthcare is usually implemented, where gaps may be first identified and innovative solutions developed. The European Programme for Community Action in the Field of Health and the Health themes of the research framework programme should aim to align their priorities with those priorities identified by this process.

Demographic change, climate change, health inequalities, major diseases such as cancer, heart disease, obesity, diabetes and Alzheimer's all represent significant challenges for European healthcare services and a real threat to European economies. One example of this can be found in the recent Commission communication on Alzheimer's, which estimates that this disease alone cost the EU 27 €130 billion in 2005, with this figure likely to increase dramatically as the population ages. These major challenges can be most effectively addressed by considered, knowledge based, long term policy making that aims towards a sustainable, equitable, healthy and productive future for all EU citizens. This means recognising that significant investment will need to be made in developing solutions to these challenges and clearly demonstrates that, although it may well be necessary to reshape and refocus public spending, the long term benefits of investment in areas such as research into the effective **prevention and treatment** of major diseases should not be sacrificed to a short term economic need to cut public spending.

Health systems are themselves striving to innovate and improve research to address this issue and we welcome the support previously demonstrated by the Commission for further research and innovation measures, for example by the continued growth in health research funding via FP6 and FP7. However, it should be noted that up until now health research funding remains overwhelmingly bio-medically focused. The potential for large health improvements coming from increased research and corresponding policy actions in the area of social determinants of health should not be ignored.

Action on the social determinants of health to improve overall health outcomes and reduce health inequities will be much more effective if basic data systems are in place at EU, national, regional and local level, and there are mechanisms to ensure that the data can be understood and applied to develop more effective interventions. Therefore, EU institutions and agencies should work with EU member states to establish a common data and knowledge base to measure, monitor, evaluate and report on health inequalities, as set out in the EC report **Solidarity in health: Reducing health inequalities in the EU**.

In order to sustain a knowledge based economy it is necessary that the working population have the right skills to integrate into this type of labour market. We would therefore reiterate that short term cost cutting should not be carried out at the expense of education, skills and training programmes which will equip the workforce with the right skills to contribute fully to a prosperous European economy. In particular, educational resources should be targeted at those population groups who are most at risk of exclusion from the labour market. These are often the same groups of people who suffer the most from health inequalities and who may also be the most adversely affected by other challenges such as the effects of climate change.

### **Empowering people in inclusive societies**

It is disappointing to see that under the sub heading "empowering people in inclusive societies" the focus is almost exclusively on jobs and job creation with very little real reference to other factors which contribute to citizens' wellbeing and quality of life. We would draw attention to work currently being carried out by the OECD on "Measuring Progress of Societies" which highlights that fact that measuring societal success purely on the basis of indicators such as GDP may be extremely misleading. At a recent Wellbeing conference in the North West of England a presentation was made giving an overview of this global project, which aims to "*foster the development of sets of key economic, social and environmental indicators to provide a comprehensive picture of how the well-being of a society is evolving and seeks to encourage each society to consider in an informed way the crucial question: is life getting better?*" Whilst one of the identified criteria for human wellbeing was indeed work/employment, there are a number of other factors which need to be addressed if we are serious about "putting people and responsibility first." These factors include: physical and mental health; knowledge and understanding; material wellbeing; freedom and self determination; and interpersonal



relationships. Healthy eco-systems, cultural heritage and arts and leisure, human rights, access to services and security are also all identified as being important measures of societal progress.

These comments do not mean we do not recognise the vital importance of job creation and ensuring the workforce has the skills to meet labour market demand. Worklessness is a major contributor to poor health, and both worklessness and ill health represent a drain on the economy. The issue of worklessness and its link to the health and wellbeing of European citizens is particularly relevant at this time of economic downturn. Recessions and are shown to have a number of negative health effects, including:

- Unemployment and the fear of unemployment are harmful to health
- Employment of disabled people reduces during recession
- Household incomes suffer and poverty increases
- Those running businesses may suffer severe stress
- Economic instability will subject many families to stress and unpleasant life changes
- Unemployed people may be isolated and stigmatised, or perceive that they are
- Depending on how the recession is handled there may be a risk of reducing levels of good employment practice, health and safety and environmental awareness

There are many reasons why employment may contribute to a sense of wellbeing such as: income; structure to the day; social contact; status; sense of identity; sense of contributing to society. However, in times of recession, many of these needs could also be met by increasing citizens' sense of community spirit and responsibility, promoting inclusion in society and local communities and recognising the value of those who contribute to their communities in other ways apart from by being in paid employment. Social enterprises and community empowerment can play an important role here, both in fostering the ideals outlined above and in helping community members develop new skills which may help them find a job. An example of this in North West England could be the Growth project in Rochdale which worked with people with mental health problems to create a community allotment. This not only assisted participants to become more involved in their community but also contributed to their knowledge about good nutrition, skills, health and wellbeing. The European commission should be looking to local and regional areas of Europe to provide evidence of these win-win situations. Action should also be supported at the regional and local level, particularly cooperation between relevant research institutes, health agencies and municipal authorities to build knowledge on economic impacts of innovative local approaches. Community development initiatives could incorporate information on collective economic effects as well as effects on different population groups in their evaluations.

Putting people and responsibility first means promoting greater cohesion and reducing social and health inequalities across the member states and regions of the EU. The necessity of developing a more socially and environmentally responsible economic model that is different to the previous one, presents an ideal opportunity to address the underlying issue of social and health inequalities in our society and to tackle the social determinants of health. We would draw the attention of the Commission to the 3 main principles for action outlined by the WHO report from the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, chaired by Michael Marmot:

- Improve the conditions of daily life - the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age.
- Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources - the structural drivers of those conditions of daily life - globally, nationally, and locally.
- Measure the problem, evaluate action, expand the knowledge base, develop a workforce that is trained in the social determinants of health, and raise public awareness about the social determinants of health.

When looking at training and re-skilling of the workforce we should seize the opportunity offered to address health inequalities by developing policy approaches that target those members of the population who are most deprived and most excluded from the labour market. By empowering the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in society to integrate more successfully into their communities and local economies huge strides can be made in reducing social and health inequalities and also wider social and economic inequalities. This in turn will contribute to a more prosperous and sustainable European Union. The links between an overall healthier workforce and a more productive and healthier economy and society are clearly made in Dame Carol Black's 2008 report "Working for a Healthier Tomorrow" in the UK.



We would advocate greater use of EU cohesion policy, in particular through the structural funds, to develop ways of addressing social and health inequalities and would support the use of the healthy life years indicator as one of the markers of success both for cohesion policy generally and for the sustainable economic recovery plan (following its inclusion in the Lisbon agenda). The local and regional dimension is where problems relating to health and wealth inequalities can be best identified and addressed. Support for SMEs and targeted provision of skills and training to allow the local community to benefit from jobs created by a thriving local economy will be vital for a sustainable future. One example of good practice from a UK region comes from the North East where a “health focused” return to work programme was introduced involving long term incapacity benefit claimants (40% of whom had been out of work for 5 years and 64% of whom had a mental health condition). Participants were given health and condition management advice, employment advice and employability support and the results were positive both for the economy and the health sector with 60% of those leaving the programme in order to start work, 41% reducing their medication and 55% reducing their use of primary care services.

### **Creating a competitive, connected, greener economy**

We support the view that the exit from the current financial crisis should mark the entry into a new sustainable market economy, which is smarter, greener and makes better use of resources. We would also highlight that public sector action, including spending and procurement practices, can be used as an effective lever to promote more sustainable business development, and consumer and business behaviour. In our region alone the National Health Service represents an £11 billion business with huge buying power. This represents a great opportunity for socially responsible procurement in the public sector to create the right environment for a truly sustainable economy in a fairer, greener, more resource efficient society, which puts the wellbeing of its citizens first. The North West has been involved with a Health Clusternet Interreg IIC project (led by the North East of England) which demonstrates the economic potential of the NHS. The project considered how procurement practices can help develop dynamic local businesses, the impact of locally relevant cross sector investments, employment opportunities for under represented groups and promotion of regional added value of R&D.

The links between the health and wellbeing of citizens and the health and wellbeing of the economy are clear. There are also clear links between future needs of healthcare systems themselves and the creation of employment opportunities as health and social care technologies will be an important growth area for investment and jobs. Development of smarter ways of working, facilitated by innovation and technology will be necessary if Europe’s health systems are to cope with the challenge of demographic change and an aging population over the coming years.

We would advocate focusing on the following areas:

- The consultation document recognises there will be a need for increased capacity in the healthcare sector. The skills and training agenda needs to recognise and reflect this. This may also include training for existing healthcare staff in the use of new systems and technologies if such developments are to be used effectively.
- Increased innovative research into the major health scourges, both prevention and cure
- The 7th EU Framework Programme for Research should include economic research analysis in health equity and health systems performance assessment as well as policy intervention assessment. In addition, more research programmes should focus around early child development, employment and sustainability.
- Incentives and encouragement for businesses to develop innovative, sustainable solutions to facilitate translation of health research into concrete products and services that can benefit citizens and address identified needs.
- The consultation document recognises the potential contribution of e-health services to the future economy. These technologies represent an important opportunity to create jobs, to address capacity issues within healthcare systems, to promote inclusion in society and wellbeing of citizens. As highlighted above, stakeholders should collaborate effectively to identify current gaps in the market where such technologies could be most effective. The European Commission can facilitate this by developing ways of sharing knowledge and best practice in this emerging area, in particular highlighting examples of innovative best practice which has already been implemented on the ground at regional level.



- We would highlight once again the importance of ensuring research and product development is of practical use when it comes to the implementation phase. This is of particular importance when, for example, developing e-health technologies to serve the health needs of an older population as their needs and their ability to use the new technology easily must be considered.

## Conclusions

We are supportive of the Commission's ambition to create a sustainable social market economy, which is smarter, greener and makes better use of resources. The points and suggestions we have made in this paper all aim to contribute to the development of a more sustainable society with a more resilient and adaptive economy.

Job creation and increased levels of employment and skills across the whole of society will be important for the creation of such an economy. However, it should be recognised that, ultimately, the health and wellbeing of its citizens is an underpinning factor for the health and wellbeing of a sustainable economy in Europe. Therefore, other factors such as community and social support networks, responsible environmental behaviour, pleasant and healthy environments, action to address the social determinants of health inequalities and the promotion of mental and physical wellbeing should not be seen as of secondary importance in the face of a short term economic crisis. All these factors are actually an integral part of the solution for a long term sustainable and prosperous Europe. We would impress upon the Commission one of the premises that led to the development of the European Union (as cited in the consolidated Lisbon Treaty text) was a determination on the part of Member States *'...to promote economic and social progress for their peoples, taking into account the principle of sustainable development and within the context of the accomplishment of the internal market and of reinforced cohesion and environmental protection, and to implement policies ensuring that advances in economic integration are accompanied by parallel progress in other fields.'*

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