

2ND OPEN EUROPEAN ALCOHOL AND HEALTH FORUM

Thursday, 30 April 2009

10h00 to 17h00

Centre Albert Borschette (Room 0-A)

Rue Froissart 36

1040 – Brussels

SUMMARY REPORT

- 1. Welcome of participants** and introduction by the Chair, Robert Madelin.
 - The Chair summarised the program for the meeting: the aim would be to look at what the European Alcohol and Health Forum is doing and had achieved and to examine any problems. He hoped that the new participants who were not present in the previous Open Forum would give an even broader perspective. The aim of the meeting is to air views and generate debate.
 - The Chair then gave a presentation on the EU Alcohol Strategy and its implementation. He identified alcohol as a major avoidable driver of premature death and ill health. He highlighted the role of the Clearing House on initiatives around alcohol and youth health in accelerating the transfer of ideas.

- 2. Round table on consumer information and education**
 - Panel members set the scene from their perspectives. The CEEV highlighted their focus on providing information to members of the wine value chain on risks and responsible drinking. An Italian campaign carried out jointly by the brewing industry and gynaecologists to advise pregnant women about alcohol was presented and reported success in encouraging increased levels of abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy.
 - The Chair concluded that the degree of co-operation in different countries is evolving, there is continuous professional development on how to do brief interventions, and there is a need to empower health professionals.

- 3. Round table on marketing communication and the role of the media**
 - The EAHF Science Group has recently finalised a report, which concluded that most of the studies examined confirmed that advertising had an impact on alcohol consumption. It was noted that there is also a body of research that has found education to be ineffective and high-cost as a policy measure but concluded that the members should not give up on education in combination with other measures.
 - Discussion raised dissent, with some expressing doubts in the validity of the Science Group's conclusions, whilst the report was found helpful by policy makers. An alternative literature review which had produced different conclusions was highlighted. It was commented that there is a need to look at the broader costs to society of marketing alcohol, such as health costs.

- There was discussion on whether or not it would be more effective to improve the regulation systems for advertising or reduce the volume of advertising. More data was requested.
- The need to look at the role of the internet in advertising was raised: viral marketing using personal friendship networks is used on the internet.
- The Chair urged members of the Forum to contribute to an electronic archive by signalling documents for inclusion and highlighting gaps in knowledge so that additional research might be considered.

4. Round table on children and young people

- A presentation was given on the most recent results of the European School Survey Project (ESPAD – www.espad.org).
- Comments included that there is a need to work more closely with and for young people: initiatives in Slovakia and Poland had given young people a voice. Responsible selling was seen as important too, eg the Challenge 21 and Challenge 25 schemes in the UK. These could all inspire others in the Forum.
- Youth alcohol problems are starting at a younger age, eg around 13: a recent study looked at the behaviour of 11-15 year olds.
- Parents were also identified as an important influence for young people.

5. Round table on (inter)governmental policy developments (WHO, EU, MS, regions)

- Robert Madelin explained that implementation and enforcement is part of the overall effort to reduce alcohol-related harm: this session would put the previous three sessions into a governmental context.
- Examples were given of activities in Portugal, Italy and Scotland.
- It was commented that there is a need to take account of national and regional policy variations. The right mix of policy needs to be identified. There is no one size fits all global policy. There is a need for the private and public sector to work together. Co-operation at local and national levels is also important.
- The WHO Regional Office for Europe works closely with the EC on a joint project on alcohol-related issues including coordinating the implementation of regional and EU strategies. Work on alcohol is more advanced in the EU but concern is increasing in the non-EU countries. The first global alcohol strategy is being prepared in consultation with the regions.
- The Swedish Presidency (from July 09) aims to focus on priority areas for action identified in the EU Alcohol Strategy, particularly regarding the protection of young people, children, unborn children, and adults as well as the ageing population.

6. Next steps and concluding remarks

- Robert Madelin summed up the Forum's activities and thanked those who had attended. He urged Forum members to keep in touch with the tools: the Clearing House, and the commitment database which is open for use and comment. There is a need to feed in ideas, to highlight research gaps, to highlight pools of knowledge to be exploited. He remarked that:
 - There is a need to expand the membership further, eg to trade unions, family organisations. Observers were urged to join the Forum as connections are important: people can learn from each other. There is not much evidence of cooperation for delivering actions yet. Cooperation on evaluation is also important.

- The upcoming elections will bring a new parliament and a new college of commissioners. Many member states are starting to look at alcohol and health. There is a need to update the map of who is taking part. European, global, regional and local coherence is needed: the local action should not be compromised. There will be a meeting in Spring 2010 to hear what the new Parliament expects from the EA&HF.

Robert Madelin concluded by thanking the Forum for the lively conversation, congratulated the Forum attendees, and thanked colleagues for the good selection of panel members.