



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
HEALTH & CONSUMER PROTECTION DIRECTORATE-GENERAL  
Public Health and Risk Assessment Directorate  
**Health Determinants Unit**

## EXPERT GROUP ON SOCIAL DETERMINANTS AND HEALTH INEQUALITIES - LUXEMBOURG 2-3 MARCH 2006



<b>Document: Towards a Workplan for the Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities</b>	
<b>Date:</b> 3 March 2006	<b>Reference:</b>
<b>To:</b> Members	<b>From:</b> Secretariat
<b>Action:</b> To discuss, with the aim of finalising a preliminary workplan by the end of the meeting which can be submitted to the High Level Committee on Public Health at its meeting on March 13/14	





## **Towards a work plan for the Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities.**

This a draft paper to assist discussion at the meeting of the Expert Group 2-3 March 2006

### **1. Background**

1.1 The High Level Committee on Public Health (HLCPH) agreed at its meeting in Cardiff, in December 2005 to establish the Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health (EGSDHI) as one of its subgroups. In doing so it requested that the group develop a workplan for consideration by the HLCPH at its next meeting in March 2006.

1.2 This document notes the suggestions for work which have already been put forward; considers the resources available and proposes a number of options for the work of the Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities over the next 3 years.

### **2. Framework and suggestions for topics**

2.1 The overall framework for the content of the workplan is set by the mandate for the group. This mandate was discussed by the HLCPH and was approved subject to the incorporation of a number of suggestions which have been included in the current version. The main tasks of the group are:

- To provide a forum for the exchange of information and good practice between Member States on social determinants of health and health inequalities.
- To provide an interface between relevant policies, projects and activities at EU level and within countries.
- To evaluate the situation and evidence base concerning health inequalities and social determinants and to provide guidance and advice on the need for further action, joint work and research in this area, including reporting and development of systematic approaches for analysing and reviewing policies at member state level.
- To review, comment and advise on elements of the public health programme's annual work plan relating to social determinants and health inequalities and on the projects contributing to this part of the work plan.

2.2 More specific suggestions for the topics that the group could address were developed during discussion in a parallel session of the HLCPPH. Priorities included:

- economic aspects – the economic consequences of health inequalities within the EU, cost effectiveness of interventions, health and economic impact of investing in tackling inequalities
- the socio-economic dimension of health determinants such as tobacco, nutrition and alcohol
- contribution of EU policies to health inequalities eg regional policy, research,
- health inequalities as a dimension of health impact assessment
- comparisons and learning from national policies

2.3 A number of ideas for work of the group were also put forward at an ad hoc meeting of those people who had been nominated as members of the Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities who were also attending the summit ‘Tackling Health Inequalities Governing for Health’ 18 October 2005. These ideas included:

- interface with work of the World Health Organization on social determinants and health inequalities.
- regional and local level action in tackling health inequalities,
- linking the work of the group to presidency priorities such as diabetes, health at work, health in all policies,
- impact of EU policies on health inequalities
- developing ideas for research on health inequalities
- collaboration with EU funded projects such as ‘Closing the Gap’

### **3. Resource considerations**

3.1 Resource considerations are clearly of key importance in deciding on what deliverables are feasible to produce. The group has no dedicated budget. Its principle resources are its members and the support of the organizations for which they work. It may also be able to benefit from resources in related pieces of work which are separately funded – such as projects in the Public Health Programme.

### **4. Other resources**

4.1 There are a number of pieces of work which are currently underway or foreseen where it may be possible for mutual collaboration with the work of the Expert Group without additional resources being needed. These include:

4.2 Macroeconomic implications of health inequalities

An epidemiological and economic analysis funded by the European Commission and led by Professor Johan Mackenbach. Work is expected to start in spring 2006 and last one year. It will lead to the production of a report describing the macroeconomic implications of health

inequalities within the European Union, what is known about the costs and benefits of interventions and the implications for action on European economies and population health.

#### 4.3 EUROTHINE

A project supported through the 2004 EU Public Health Programme. It is coordinated by the Erasmus University in the Netherlands. It will produce a report summarising the health inequalities situation in countries in Europe, examine cost effectiveness of interventions and analyse the feasibility of establishing a European centre for work on health inequalities.

#### 4.4 Closing the gap

A project supported through the 2004 EU Public Health Programme. It is led by Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA, Germany) and coordinated by EuroHealthNet. Outputs will include – a web site containing information on National Action on Health Inequalities, an online directory of good practices and a report on EU policies which impact on health inequalities.

#### 4.5 Obesity and socio-economic position.

A state of the art review of the association between obesity and socio-economic position and the implications for action. It will be carried out by a team led by Dr Aileen Robertson of Suhr's University College, Copenhagen and will lead to the production of a report towards the end of 2006.

### **5. Future Resources**

Organizations and Member States may wish to point out or even provide additional resources to support the work of the group. If so it would be helpful if they could contact the Commission to discuss what work they might be interested in providing resources for.

### **5. Conclusions and initial proposals for workplan**

The work of the group needs to be consistent with its mandate, relevant to the countries and organisations represented and approved by the High Level Committee on Public Health. The outputs chosen need to have a high probability of achieving useful results within the time and resources available. The initial work of the group will need to rely on the resources which are available now and the willingness of its members to contribute. With these considerations in mind the following elements are suggested for initial consideration by the group.

### **7. General methods of working**

7.1 The group will aim to meet twice per year. If possible the same representatives should come to each meeting. The work of the group will continue between meetings via email, websites and other forms of communication.

7.2 Each meeting will typically include: 3-4 oral presentations from countries, discussion and review of key deliverables from the group, input from relevant projects and international organizations and consideration of EU issues with input from Commission services. The workplan will be kept under review. A report from each meeting will be produced by the Commission and following comments from members of the group will be made available to the High Level Committee on Public Health.

7.3 All documents, slides and reports of the group will be publicly available via the Commission web site unless there is a reason not to do this in line with the Commission's policies on access to information.

## **8. Specific outputs and workpackages.**

8.1 The group will put forward a workplan with a number of specific outputs for approval by the High Level Committee on Public Health. Taking account of the suggestions and resources available it is proposed that work initially focuses on the following areas:

### **8.2 Country Policies**

Economic implications of health inequalities.

Socio-economic dimension of specific health policy issues

Contribution of EU policies to reducing health inequalities

8.3 These topics are described in more detail in the following section on Workpackages. Outputs of each workpackage are summarised at Annex 1.

## 9. **Workpackage 1. Country policies**

9.1 The aim is to facilitate information sharing and dissemination of good practice on policies and action to tackle social determinants of health and health inequalities. The main outputs will be a number of oral presentations and written case studies supplemented by access to original documents via websites. A link with the website of the Closing the Gap Project will be explored. During the period of this work discussion will take place on what further methods may be suitable for improving information sharing and mutual learning – such as through peer reviews for example.

### 9.2 **Methods and work**

Oral and written presentations to the group

Country representatives will be invited to make an oral presentation at least once during the lifetime of the group. The presentation to cover their national situation, policies (national and where relevant regional and local) and action in relation to socio-economic health inequalities, outcomes and lessons learned.

Written Case Studies

Country representatives invited to provide a written case study covering similar material to their oral presentation, according to guidelines to be developed by the group.

Collection and exchange of documentation

Countries to be invited to contribute examples of policy relevant documents such as – epidemiological assessments of health inequalities, policy documents, evaluations in original language and if available in other community languages. Documents to be made available electronically if possible using Closing the Gap and European Commission websites.

### 9.3 **Responsibilities**

European Commission - coordination

Members -written and oral contributions

Closing the Gap project - collaboration on case studies and web site.

	<b>Outputs 1: Country Policies</b>	<b>Time scale</b>
1.1	oral presentations of around 10 minutes each with questions – organized on a rotating basis with a few presentations at each meeting of the group.	4-8 presentations per year 2006-2008
1.2	case studies - 10 or more case studies to be finalised	first cases studies ready early 2007, finish Dec 2008
1.3	National documentation available in original language and if available in other community languages with access via Closing the Gap and Commission sites.	From March 2006 onwards

## 10. Workpackage II. Economic implications

10.1 Responding to the interest expressed at the High Level Committee on Public Health, the aim is to produce information relevant to policy makers on economic issues in social determinants and health inequalities; in particular concentrating on cost effectiveness of interventions and macroeconomic implications.

### 10.2 Methods and work

Expert review of macroeconomic implications

A review of macroeconomic implications of socio-economic inequalities in health to be carried out by a team led by Professor Mackenbach of Erasmus University contracted by the European Commission. The group will have the opportunity to input to the work and comment on the interim and draft final report.

Cost effectiveness of interventions on health inequalities

The group will be briefed on the work of the EUROTHINE project which is carrying out a review of the cost effectiveness of interventions. Ways of contributing and further learning from this work will be explored.

### 10.3 Responsibilities

Professor Mackenbach/Erasmus University

– to carry out the review and writing of the report on Macroeconomic implications of health inequalities

- to lead on liaison with the EUROTHINE project

European Commission to manage the contract with Erasmus on macroeconomic implications

- to manage the contract for the EUROTHINE project.

Members – to provide contributions and input to both pieces of work including comment on interim and draft final reports.

World Health Organization – discussions to take place on areas of collaboration.

	<b>Outputs II: Economic implications</b>	<b>Time scale</b>
2.1	Report on Macroeconomic implications of health inequalities	- comments on interim report September/October 2006  - Comments on draft final report first quarter of 2007 – finalisation of report during 2007
2.2	Contributions to EUROTHINE review of cost effectiveness of interventions	To be agreed

## **11. Workpackage III. Socio-economic dimension of specific health policy issues**

11.1 The aim is to improve understanding of the socio-economic dimensions relevant to policy on selected priority health issues. The topic of obesity is proposed for inclusion under this heading because of the opportunity to inform policy making currently taking place at Member State and EU level on diet, nutrition and physical activity. Obesity was also one of the issues highlighted as a particular areas of concern in the Summit on Health Inequalities held under the UK presidency. It will also be addressed at a ministerial conference organised by WHO European Office in December 2006. Other topics may be included under this heading depending on the interest and resources of the group.

### 11.2 Methods and Work

A state of the art review will be carried out led by Dr Aileen Robertson of Suhr's University College Copenhagen under contract to the Commission. The review to analyse associations between socio-economic factors and obesity, reasons for these associations, evidence on interventions tackling obesity with particular reference to less advantaged social groups and will aim to provide a number of pointers relevant to policy. The expert group will be invited to comment on the scope and methods of the work prior to it commencing and will also be asked to contribute examples and comment on the interim and draft final reports.

### 11.3 Responsibilities

Dr Aileen Robertson – Suhr's University. To lead the work of the review and the writing of the report.

European Commission – to coordinate and manage the contract with Suhr's University  
Members of the group – to provide material and examples for the review and comment on draft reports.

World Health Organization – liaison between the work of the Expert Group and the WHO programme on obesity. Possible input from the group into the ministerial conference planned for end 2006

	<b>Outputs III: Socio-economic dimension in specific health policy issues</b>	<b>Time scale</b>
<b>3.1</b>	State of the art review on obesity and socio-economic factors	Comments on interim report mid 2006. Draft final report October 2006. Distribution of report 2007

## 12. **Workpackage IV. EU Policies**

12.1 A concern to address health inequalities is a long standing component of the EU's public health policy. The Public Health Programme has been the main vehicle for action. Other EU policies clearly also have a contribution to make and several of these already have a specific element related to health. Social policy is one such example where addressing access to health care for socially excluded groups is part of national action plans on social inclusion under the Open Method of Coordination. Regional Policy is another important area. The role of EU regional policy in reducing differences in regional economic performance is likely to have a profound and positive influence on the health inequalities between people living in different regions of the Community.

### 12.2 Methods and Work

Overview of contribution of selected policies. Commission services will be invited to present to the expert group on a number of selected policy areas including Regional Policy, Social Policy and Research. A briefing paper will also be produced for each policy area with the opportunity for the group to comment and contribute. These will be collected together to form an overview document over the next 2 years.

Consultation on EU policies. Relevant consultation documents on EU policy will also be circulated to the group for comments.

Liaison will also take place with the Closing the Gap project which is analysing the impact of several EU policies on socio-economic health inequalities.

### 12.3 Responsibilities

European Commission – to provide briefing on EU policies and their contribution and impact on health inequalities.

Members – comment and contributions.

	<b>Outputs IV: EU Policies</b>	<b>Time scale</b>
<b>4.1</b>	Overview of contribution of selected policies including Regional, Employment, Research,	March 2008



**Annex I: Summary of Proposed Outputs – Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities – March 2006**

Description	Actions/Outputs	Lead	Other contributions	Timescale
Case studies on national policies on social determinants and health inequalities	10 or more case studies for exchange within the Group, possible publication on web site and hard copy.	European Commission,	Member States to contribute case studies.  Closing the Gap Project to assist in coordination with a view to incorporating in project output.	First case studies by 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting of group (estimated October 2006)  10 case studies by March 2008
Macroeconomic implications of health inequalities	Report on analysis and implications for action	Prof. Mackenbach, Erasmus University, Rotterdam.	Comments and contributions required from all members of group.	Comments on interim report September/October 2006  Report finalised 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2007
Obesity and socio-economic group.	State of the art review and implications for action.	Dr Aileen Robertson  Suhr's University Copenhagen.	Liaison with WHO comments from all members	Comments on interim report mid 2006. Draft final report October 2006. Distribution of report 2007
Contribution of EU policies to tackling health inequalities	Overview of contribution of selected policies including Regional, Employment, Research,	European Commission	Comments from Members	March 2008