

Citizens and stakeholders support Commissioner Byrne on future of EU health policy

Health experts, stakeholders and individual citizens participating in Commissioner Byrne's consultation on the future of EU health policy (see [IP/04/934](#)) have broadly endorsed his vision of "good health for all". The reflection process generated a wide debate across the EU and beyond, with contributions from all corners of the Union and third countries as different as the USA and India. Mr. Byrne has received over 170 responses in total. Respondents agreed with him on the need for Europe to pro-actively promote good health. Action on tobacco, in particular, was a top priority, along with alcohol, nutrition, exercise and promoting safe food. Many stressed the urgent need to promote healthy lifestyles to children and teenagers to help counter problems such as obesity. Other factors impacting on health, such as environmental, social and economic issues, were also viewed as important. Respondents backed Commissioner Byrne on the need to ensure all EU policies are good for health – with some putting forward proposals on how to achieve this by using health impact assessment, health targets or synergies with other EU policies. More resources for health policy were called for. Mr. Byrne will hand on the results of his consultation to Markos Kyprianou, who is due to take over from him as Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection on 1 November.

David Byrne said: "The message from this consultation is loud and clear. Europeans attach a very high priority to public health. They want to see concrete results from the EU in this area and they want to be involved in health policy debates."

There was general support for the need to promote healthy lifestyles with a long term perspective – especially by educating children and providing information to help citizens make healthy choices. Many respondents called on the EU to strike the right balance between promoting health and supporting access to high quality treatment for diseases such as cancer, heart disease, respiratory illnesses, gender-specific and rare diseases.

Respondents asked the EU to implement a comprehensive and coherent approach to health, encompassing EU policies as diverse as education, trade, environment, internal market, social affairs, agriculture, transport and regional aid. The Commission was also urged to involve stakeholders more systematically in policy-making.

There were calls for the EU to broaden its role in international health and to focus the EU's Structural Funds (social and regional assistance programmes), particularly in the EU's poorer members, on bridging the health gap within and between EU countries. Many stressed the need for more EU resources for health, in particular for health research and partnerships.

Many respondents supported positioning health as a driver of economic growth by showing the benefits to public finances and the economy of preventing illness. Others had concerns that emphasising the value of health for the economy could undermine social values such as health as a basic human right.

Finally, individual respondents raised a wide range of additional specific issues.

Commissioner Byrne will share these results with incoming Commissioner Markos Kyprianou so that he can take forward this process and shape the future EU health strategy.

Mr Byrne's reflection paper and the list of responses received are available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_overview/strategy/reflection_process_en.htm

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