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## RESPONSE TO THE REFLECTION PROCESS FOR A NEW EU HEALTH STRATEGY *“Enabling good Health for all”*

**The European Institute of Women's Health (EIWH)** is a non-governmental organisation working to make the health and well-being of women a priority for the European Union and Member States.

<http://www.eurohealth.ie>

The European Institute of Women's Health has followed with great interest the evolving EU health policy and warmly welcomes **Commissioner Byrne's Reflection Process**. As citizens of Europe and as women looking after family health we are most anxious to contribute to the reflection process. We very much agree with the approach taken by Commissioner Byrne that the important health challenges facing our societies in Europe are a shared responsibility. Achieving good health for all is now more than ever a necessity that requires the participation of all actors in society. For good health to become a driving force behind all policy making, we need to ensure that our societies and their democratic structure act in synergy and that this is understood and supported by their citizens. We fully agree with the Commission's strategy to focus on health promotion, prevention and sharing best practice across Europe. Healthy lifestyles are important, illness is costly. All too often national healthcare systems have to focus their resources on expensive treatment and care.

To tackle such currently important challenges as our ageing population and life-style related conditions and diseases, such as obesity and chronic diseases, we need to encourage and engage citizens themselves in the process of health policy formulation. We welcome the initiative to integrate health into the Lisbon agenda and develop a structural indicator for monitoring the evolution of healthy life years. The EIWH fully supports the Commissioner's proposal to integrate health into other policies and wish to offer the following suggestion for achieving good health for all:

## **Healthy Ageing – to increase healthy life and reduce the burden of disease**

### **Implement WHO policy recommendations of Active Ageing across the life span.**

As part of the Second United Nations World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002, WHO contributed a policy framework for action to promote active ageing. Some of the actions proposed are:

- Prevent and reduce the burden of excess disabilities, chronic disease and premature mortality.
- Reduce risk factors associated with major diseases and increase factors that protect health throughout the life course.
- Develop a continuum of affordable, accessible, high quality and age-friendly health and social services that address the needs and rights of women and men as they age.

**Our Recommendation:** We agree with WHO that Healthy Ageing is a lifelong process. By instituting **the Open Method of Coordination in the health field**, the Commission together with Member States has the opportunity to agree on

- setting gender-specific measurable targets to improve the health status and reduce chronic diseases, disabilities and premature mortality.
- sharing best practice of prevention and screening programmes that have proven to be effective to women and men.

## **Clear and Reliable Health Information for citizens and patients about diseases and treatment options**

Women have a keen interest in health information. The EIUH believes that easily accessible and easily understandable, high-quality, accurate, reliable and up-to-date health and disease information to patients and the general public is an essential step towards achieving a high level of health protection. We feel that modern information technology has the potential to empower and support women as patients, guardians and carers of family health. We believe that appropriate information can improve communication between patients and their doctors, lead to improved health status and a sense of being in control. In turn this should enable patients and the general public to become more discerning and able to assess the wide variety of information available to make better choices and decisions.

**Our Recommendations:** As an essential step towards achieving good health for all, make easily accessible and easily understandable, high-quality, accurate, reliable and up-to-date health and disease information available to patients and the general public. The current European policy developments on improving health information presents an opportunity to ensure that all initiatives are harnessed to the benefit of better health outcomes. More specifically we recommend an EU information framework along the following lines

- Health education and disease awareness campaigns. For this we would suggest creating partnerships that bring together stakeholders with the different expertise needed. A consortium of patient groups and health NGOs can provide the patient/general public perspective.

- Set up pilot projects to support chronic patients in the self-management of their disease, or working in partnership to support other patients

The EIWH has experience in working with multi-stakeholders across different sectors and disciplines in the health field and moving from national to EU level and vice-versa. The EIWH aims to provide the gender and informal carer perspective and is looking forward to contributing further to the Commission's new Public Health strategy.

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