

A reflection process for a new EU Health Strategy: Enabling good health for all Observations from the World Federation of Advertisers (WFA)

1 ENABLING GOOD HEALTH FOR ALL

WFA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's Reflection Process for a new EU health strategy. We fully share the Commission's vision relating to

- the need to tackle differences in socio-economic and environmental factors affecting health in order to eliminate the existing health gaps across the EU
- the need for health to become a driving force behind all policy-making

- the need to focus on promoting good health rather than treating ill health
- the need for prevention to be viewed as a key element for future policy development.

In addition, we are pleased to see the Commission's emphasis on the importance of health information as one of the crucial elements in improving the effective functioning of health systems and stimulating patient involvement.

2 GOOD HEALTH AS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

WFA welcomes the Commission's strong views on the need for different actors and stakeholders to cooperate in order to foster good health.

Good health is related to the availability of reliable, accessible and user-friendly information on staying healthy and healthy lifestyles. If health problems do occur, information is needed on their specific condition and treatment options. Information empowers citizens to make the right choices.

Effective communication and communication tools are therefore indispensable in the process to improve illness prevention, treatment and health promotion. In addition, communicating health information to patients is very much in line with the current trend towards more involved patients. The 'doctor knows best' adage no longer applies. Increasingly, patients

themselves want to be in charge of their treatment and treatment options.

Informed patients take responsibility for their health care and treatments and can make an active contribution to reducing unnecessary healthcare spending. Access to information from a variety of sources is therefore indispensable.

WFA, based on its extensive experience and involvement in the field of communication, would like to emphasise the importance of effective and relevant communication in the health arena, and to assess with the Commission the options for improving the current situation. In particular, we would be happy to explore the potential value of bringing together the main players and developing suitable models for partnerships to progress the issue.

3 SOUND SCIENCE AS A BASIS FOR HEALTH CLAIMS

In the context of accessible and reliable health information, WFA would like to point to the importance of having an EU-wide framework for health claims. This is essential in overcoming the barriers to cross-border trade that still exist in this field, while ensuring a high and uniform level of consumer protection.

All such health claims should be scientifically substantiated, verifiable, and meaningful. Using sound science as a basis of health claims on food labels helps to empower consumers to make appropriate food choices, and to foster food product innovation in the EU.

However, care must be taken not to impose arbitrary restrictions on such claims based on a certain level of one or the other ingredient – which would risk running counter to the proportionality and effectiveness of health policy at European level.

WFA looks forward to further fruitful work with the Commission, and remains committed to assisting the Commission in its efforts to enable good health for all.

WFA, 15 October 2004

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