

Enabling Good Health for All: A Reflection Process for a New EU Health Strategy

David Byrne European Commission

– Response from the International Union for Health Promotion & Education European Region

The International Union for Health Promotion & Education European Region (IUHPE/EURO) is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the above consultation document.

Mr Byrne's broad and holistic understanding of health that moves beyond just absence of illness is to be commended. The proposed strategy reflects strongly the underlying concepts and principles of health promotion, which is regarded as a combination of educational, organisational, economic and political actions designed with consumer participation, to enable individuals, groups and communities to increase control over, and to improve their health through personal, social and environmental changes. The values that underpin Mr Byrne's approach also reflect those of health promotion – social justice, participation, empowerment and equity for all. We would just stress the importance of social well-being and add it to his emphasis on physical and mental well-being.

Enabling Good Health For All

We would fully support the link between good health and economic and sustainable development, and endorse the view proposed in the strategy, to focus on health in all policies, not only to focus on the health care sector alone. This is often a limitation in the health policies of most Member States and we feel that the EU has a major role here to promote such a wider inter-sectoral healthy public policy approach. We endorse the need to focus on the basic pre-determinants of good health – peace, food, shelter, and a sustainable eco-system and the expressed resources swing from treating ill health to promoting health.

Good Health as Shared Responsibility

The core principles of partnership and participation are essential in the empowerment of European citizens to achieve good health. We would agree strongly that citizens can be enabled to make the right choices with regard to their health through effective health education, but also the healthy choices can be made easier choices through effective health public policy – the cited example of the Irish Governments' smoking legislation to protect the health of workers in pubs is to be commended and serves as a good example. We would encourage the EU to monitor closely such initiatives and ensure they are encouraged more widely. Two major initiatives by the EU are to be commended in this regard – the Public Health Portal and the development of the European Health Knowledge and Information System. With regard to the Public Health Portal, it is important to stress the need for continued liaison and involvement with health promotion technical experts throughout Europe as effective communication is the key to good health education, which involves decision-making and social skills as well as the simple transmission of information. With regard to the second example cited – this should be a comprehensive Health Information & Knowledge System and not just an Illness Information System. Therefore the EU is in a strong position to support the further research needed to develop new measures to monitor salutogenic as well as pathogenic aspects of health, and ensure these are used to interrelate with EC practical interventions to tackle health determinants. The

importance of a national health development measure, using positive health indicators, similar to GNP, is to be encouraged.

Health Generates Wealth

IUHPE/EURO has been linking with numerous health promotion networks throughout Europe such as the WHO European Centre for Investment and Health, European Network for Workplace Health Promotion, EuroHealthNet, and others to make the health and economic case for a strong and healthy workforce and health implications of global trade agreements. This work also relates to other European 'health promotion settings based' networks such as schools, universities, hospitals, etc. The EU is in a strong central position to focus on commonalities in the settings based approach to health promotion and link these networks together to ensure optimum European added-value.

Towards a European Strategy enabling Good Health for All

IUHPE would endorse the need to make the case for investment in the maintenance and promotion of health a key economic priority. This case can be made through prevention but also through the settings based approach to a healthy workforce for example. Commissioner Byrne rightly focuses on the key strategies of health promotion to address the behavioural, social and environmental determinants of health. We would also endorse the need to look beyond the health sector to adopt healthy public policy in all aspects of economic, agricultural, transport, employment, education and environmental sectors.

But we would go further in research terms to encourage the EU to move beyond biomedical research, to support more social scientific and policy development research into new ways to measure health and the implications of health interventions. DG SANCO are to be congratulated in funding research into effectiveness of health promotion and the need to demonstrate evidence into practice, but more resources are needed to transfer knowledge to countries whose research/resource base is weak – in particular among the new member states.

Also we would highlight the need for sustainable capacity and competency building through effective education and training – this has already begun under the various European Masters Programmes in aspects of public health but needs to link more clearly with the Bologna Process which is bringing the higher education systems of European countries together by 2010. This work needs to be cascaded through education and training systems at various levels throughout member states. IUHPE/EURO is establishing a European Accreditation and Professional Practice in Health Promotion to ensure good and efficient practice throughout Europe.

Mobilising Different Actors: Partnerships for Health

IUHPE would congratulate the move towards openness and civil society engagement by the EU in the public health arena. We would propose the need for a Health Promotion network to complement the Patients Platform/Network already established. Therefore taking this lead offered by the EC Health Policy Forum, and the devised system of interlinked networks, could be adapted to produce a European Health Promotion Network (EHPN). It is suggested that the criteria for the different network levels should be made transparent, as follows:

- It seems sensible that such a networking system could be complementary or

become a specialist link to the EC Public Health Forum, in order to gain maximum efficiency and effectiveness from both infrastructures.

- The important factor would be to ensure that the above networking system operates in both directions – from bottom up as well as top down. Guidance could come strategically from both the EC Public Health Programme and from the European Health Policy Forum, as indicated above. It would enable other European governmental organizations, such as the European Region of the World Health Organisation, and non-governmental organisations, such as IUHPE/EURO, to become more synergistic and work more closely together to benefit of health for all within the European Region.

Good Health in Europe: a View of the Future

There is a need to ensure more substantive resources to ensure public health is not marginalised.

IUHPE would fully support Commissioner Byrne's vision of the future and would be pleased to use the resources of its members expertise and experience throughout all member states and the wider Europe to achieve this vision in practice.

John Kenneth Davies
Vice President
European Region
International Union for Health Promotion & Education
Paris

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