



European Union Health Policy Forum

The Health Forum's Role: A Renewed Mandate

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1. Policy Context

In October 2007 the European Commission adopted the White Paper "Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013"¹. This strategic document is intended to give a direction to Community activities in the field of health for the coming years in order to further improve and protect health in the EU and beyond its borders. The strategy identifies areas where the Member States cannot act effectively alone and where cooperative action at the Community level adds value to national actions. It addresses major challenges to the health of the European population that require a new strategic approach and proposes actions aimed at fostering good health in an ageing Europe, protecting citizens from health threats, supporting dynamic health systems and new technologies. This strategic approach is underpinned by four fundamental principles. The Strategy is based on shared health values; health is the greatest wealth; health in all policies (HIAP) and strengthening the EU voice in global health. It is also based on shared values including the "participation of citizens in and their influence on decision making". The Health Forum is part of the response to this last principle.

The Council endorsed the Strategy on 29 November 2007². It also called upon the Commission to develop implementing measures and the Member States to cooperate with the Commission on the implementation of the Strategy.

Within the Strategy the Commission will strengthen further the involvement of all stakeholders in contributing to the development and implementation of actions to protect and improve the health of European citizens. Building on the progress made through structures such as the Health Forum, the Commission will work closely with stakeholder groups, and with regional and local level bodies with a view to optimising their contribution to the implementation of the Strategy.

The European Union Health Forum originated in 2001 with the aim of bringing together umbrella organisations in the health sector in order to ensure that the European Commission's health policy is transparent and responsive to public concerns. During the past years it has served as an instrument for communication between the Commission and members and has provided useful feedback on EC policy proposals and implementing actions. In the context of the adoption of the new Health Strategy it is necessary to review the functioning of the Forum and adjust the mandate, composition and working methods. The members of the Forum have discussed the mandate at several meetings and together with the Commission are seeking a model for functioning of the Forum that will lead to

¹ COM(2007)630 final

² Council Conclusions 15611/07 SAN226

more efficient operation, better contribution to policy making and a more active role for members in the implementation of the Health Strategy.

On this basis, the EU Health Forum has two components: the EU Health Policy Forum with a defined number of non-governmental umbrella organisations and the EU Open Health Forum, a major annual health event (see point 5.)

2. Goal and Objectives

The overarching goal of the EU Health Forum **is to contribute to the development and implementation of actions to protect and improve the health of European citizens.** In particular, the objectives of the Forum are:

- **To provide a communication channel between policy makers and stakeholders on EU health policy issues.** The information in this channel should flow in both directions and should also facilitate communication among stakeholders. This requires a strong commitment of Forum members both to ensure dissemination within their networks but also to reach beyond their members in an open and inclusive manner.
- **To enable stakeholders to contribute to EU health policies** by identifying emerging health issues, proposing policy options or shaping and giving feedback on policy proposals and implementing measures;
- **To support delivery of the EU Health Strategy** by health advocacy and other appropriate means and tools at EU, national, regional and local levels.
- **To enable health actors at national and local level** to define EU level work that will support their agenda.
- **To define European work packages** that are relevant to the broader range of health actors, e.g. youth, lifestyles, workplace, health promotion or HIAP.

3. Principles of Operation

The EU Health Forum is an informal communication and consultation forum. It is an advisory body that can provide recommendations and advice, though these are not binding for the members of the Forum or the Commission.

Membership of the Forum should be open to EU-level organisations which are prepared and able to commit to a common mission to protect, promote and improve the health of European citizens. The members of the Forum are committed to the implementation of the Health Strategy and to active participation in the Forum's activities.

Participation in the Forum is voluntary and the members of the Forum are not compensated for their work for the Forum.

Composition of the forum should be balanced and should ensure that the following types of organisations are represented:

- Non-governmental organisations in the public health field and patients' organisations;
- Organisations representing health professionals and trade unions;
- Health service providers and health insurance;
- Economic operators with an interest in and commitment to health promotion, protection and improvement.

4. Membership

The membership of the EU Health Forum should concentrate on associations with a pan-European coverage, rather than on national or regional organisations. In general preference is given to umbrella organisations covering several topics or mandated by other organisations to represent them in the Forum. For practical reasons the Commission will generally seek to keep membership limited to around 50 organisations.

In the past the selection criteria below were used in setting up the EU Health Forum. These criteria will continue to be applicable to all members in future. New requirements for transparency in the membership organisations were recently agreed by the members of the Forum and these shall become an additional selection criterion.

Broad coverage of issues: Organisations should cover broad, horizontal issues which are of relevance to developing the Community's health agenda and with an interest in overall public health policy development.

Representativeness: Organisations should be recognised as being able to speak for their sector. Their membership should cover (operations) in at least half, (currently 14) and, ideally, all (currently 27) Member States. Organisations should be committed to extending their membership.

Active involvement: Each participating organisation should contribute actively to the work of the EU Health Policy Forum. Failure to do so will lead to discontinuation of membership.

Transparency. Organisations should apply the principles of transparency agreed by the members of the EU HPF in the past as set out in the EUHPF guiding principles with regard to transparency published on the forum's website, as well as the European Transparency Initiative.

Membership is based on application by an organisation, followed by approval by the Commission. Membership should be reviewed on a regular basis in order to check that members still fulfil the basic criteria.

Representatives of the Team Presidency, other Member States and Candidate Countries, European Parliament, and WHO will be invited to participate in the EUHPF as observers. External experts may also be invited to meetings for discussion on specific topics.

5. Working Methods

The work of the EU Health Forum takes two main forms, the EU Health Policy Forum and the Open Health Forum:

EU Health Policy Forum

The EU Health Policy Forum (EUHPF) is a one-day meeting of all members of the Forum organised by the Commission twice a year. The members shall be represented at the Forum meeting at the highest possible level; the representative's name and the organisational office they hold shall be recorded at each meeting of the Forum.

To enable the members to strengthen the input of the EU Health Policy Forum in the EU health policy making process, the Commission and the members identify key areas of work and develop an annual work plan. The strategic priorities identified by the current members of the current Forum are specified in the work plan for 2009 and 2010 which will be published following adoption.

Working groups are flexible formations that allow members with specific interest to continue the work in the inter-session period. They can work on the topics identified in the work plan and prepare background documents or draft recommendations for discussion and adoption by the Forum. Working groups can also be formed ad hoc by volunteering organisations to respond to emerging and urgent issues. The outcomes of the work done by this type of WG will then be presented at the next full Forum meeting.

The EUHPF can adopt position papers and recommendations. These are considered to be adopted if they are supported by two-thirds majority of members present at the Forum meeting or participating in a formal email consultation. The list of those organisations that supported the recommendations will be an annex to the recommendations concerned. The practical work of preparing these recommendations could take place in working group meetings. In addition members who have a specific interest can create special partnerships. The EUHPF plenary will have an opportunity to discuss the recommendations.

The Open Health Forum

The Open Health Forum (OHF) is open to interested parties from the broader community of interest in EU health policy. The Open Forum takes the form of a one-day conference organised by the Commission. The agenda is prepared by the Commission and a steering committee that consists of active EUHPF members.

6. Timetable

The Commission intends to launch a call for applications for future membership of the Forum during 2009. Applications should be made by any current member interested in continuing to serve as well as by other eligible organisations. The decision to appoint will need to be made by formal College procedure. The current Forum will serve until replaced.

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