

## COUNCIL WORKING PARTY ON PUBLIC HEALTH AT SENIOR LEVEL

SECOND MEETING, 29 MAY 2009

### PROGRESS ON THE EU HEALTH STRATEGY

The Commission's White Paper "Together for Health, a Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013" was adopted in October 2007. It sets out four principles and three strategic objectives that should underpin all health action.

The overview below reflects recent progress made as well as current and forthcoming initiatives in pursuing these principles and objectives. It also includes information on the involvement of relevant expert working groups or committees.

One important recent step was strengthening the Commission Inter-service group on Public Health, which met in March 2009 and aims at mobilising other relevant policies to implement the strategy. In addition, the structure of Commission-led structures in the field of health has been slightly amended and updated, as annexed to this document.

#### **Implementing the Health Strategy**

##### **Principle 1: A Strategy based on Shared Health Values**

- Reducing inequities: The Commission is planning to adopt in September 2009 a communication "Solidarity in health: Reducing health inequalities in the EU". The two Directorate-Generals (DGs) responsible for Health and for Social Affairs are collaborating on this initiative in order to stress the horizontal character of the problem. This issue is also discussed in the "Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities".

##### **Principle 2: "Health is the Greatest Wealth"**

- Investment in health: The Commission is promoting the need for investment in health through the EU Structural Funds. The Commission communication "Driving European Recovery" adopted on 4 March, proposed the simplification of the rules for the European Social Fund (ESF) to allow an immediate increase of advance payments to the Member States, enabling them to more effectively respond to crisis-driven needs. This has been recently approved by the Council and the European Parliament.
- Lisbon Agenda post-2010: The next EPSCO Council in June 2009 (Social ministers) will have the first policy debate on the future of the EU's Growth and Jobs Strategy. The Social Protection Committee (social part of the Open Method of Coordination of Member States at EU level) in collaboration with the Commission has prepared a detailed contribution to this debate, which also points out the economic value of health.

##### **Principle 3: Health in all Policies (HIAP)**

- **Establishing a Commission Inter-service group (ISG) on Health**: More than 20 Commission Directorate-Generals (DGs) have committed to actively participate in this group, which meets 2-3 times per year. The overall goal of the ISG, which is coordinated by DG Health and Consumers, will be to create a strategic and outcome-oriented approach in integrating health in other policies. This will serve as a means to achieve the objectives of the EU Health Strategy. All DGs are invited to contribute to background papers prepared for this Senior Council Working Party.

Several thematic sub-groups have been set up focusing on emerging strategic issues, involving various DGs: Dynamic health systems, Health information, HIV/AIDS, Global Health, Health and Environment, and Health Security.

- **Recent and ongoing Commission activities aiming at mainstreaming health in other policies (HIAP):**
  - Social policy: The DGs for Health and Social affairs are cooperating on many issues of common interest. Health concerns are systematically taken into account in the activities of the Social Protection Committee. Recent outcomes include the 2009 Joint Report in Social Protection and Social Inclusion, a Key messages paper submitted to the March EP-SCO Council meeting and the Committee's contribution to the Ministerial debate on the post-2010 Lisbon Agenda.
  - Health and environment: This includes numerous cross-cutting issues such as in-door air and water quality, antibiotic resistance, chemicals, pesticides, biodiversity, climate change and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. The Commission sub-group on health and environment has started preparing the revision of the post-2010 Environment and Health Action Plan and preparing for the WHO Ministerial conference to be held in early 2010.
  - Education and Youth: The Commission launched in April 2009 an internet-based initiative targeting young people between 15 and 25. The topics will range from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, sexual and mental health to nutrition and physical activity, to youth involvement, health and work, education and media. A conference on Youth Health is taking place in July 2009. In September 2009 the Commission will organise together with the Swedish Presidency a Conference on "Mental Health in Youth and Education".
  - Pharmaceuticals: A Commission Communication on the Pharmaceutical Sector Inquiry will be adopted in July 2009. This will also assess the costs for health systems deriving from unnecessary market-entry delays. The Commission proposals for three directives on Counterfeit medicines, Patients information and Pharmacovigilance (all part of the Pharmaceutical package, adopted in December 2008) are currently in co-decision.
  - Research: More than 100 health projects have been selected for funding through the EU's Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7) in 2009. An indicative budget of €476 Mio is available for this year's call for proposals.
  - Regional Policy: More than €5 billion is available for investment in health through the EU's Cohesion Policy in the period 2007-2013. The Commission supports relevant stakeholders to utilise the budget available to finance health projects. In particular with a view to the current economic situation, investment in social and health projects has been targeted as being crucial for reducing the human cost of the crisis. In addition, indirect health investments through other policies are encouraged.
  - Enterprise and Industry: The Commission is currently preparing a report on "Reprocessing of Medical Devices" for the Council and the European Parliament for 2010.
  - Enlargement: A Commission report on "Five years of an enlarged EU. Economic achievements and challenges", published in January 2009, stresses the importance of modernising healthcare systems as one of the main challenges for the newer Member States.
  - Information and Communication Technologies: See separate document on eHealth.

#### **Principle 4: Strengthening the EU's Voice in Global Health**

- The Commission is integrating and promoting health in external relations instruments, such as the collaboration with the WHO, neighbourhood policy, development aid and enlargement policy. This includes a key role in the implementation process of the WHO Frame-

work Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and in the negotiations on its protocol on illicit trade.

- A Commission Interservice group on Global health met twice in 2009 to discuss a wide range of issues: External relations, development aid, neighbourhood, enlargement, trade and research policy, and the bilateral relations with the WHO. This group is considering a communication on "Global Health" for 2010.

### **Objective 1: Fostering Good Health in an Ageing Europe**

- Demographic change: The Member State Ageing Working Group (of the Economic Policy Committee) published together with the Commission in February "The 2009 Ageing Report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU-27 Member States (2008-2060)". Based on this report the Commission adopted in April 2009 a communication "Dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the EU", which also refers to the economic role of healthy populations. As a next step the Commission is considering publishing a Green paper launching the debate on "Healthy Ageing".
- Rare diseases: The Commission adopted a communication and a draft Council recommendation on a European action in the field of rare diseases in November 2008. Final adoption of the recommendation is expected at the June EPSCO Council meeting. In this context a European Committee of Experts on Rare Diseases will be established.
- Alzheimer's: The Commission will adopt in July 2009 a Communication as well as a proposal for a Council Recommendation for Joint Programming of Research, in the field of Alzheimer's disease. The initiative aims at stressing the issue's importance, sharing knowledge and providing best practices for responding to the challenges deriving from Alzheimer's in the Member States.
- Cancer: A Commission communication on action against cancer, to be published in July 2009, aims at establishing a European multi-stakeholder platform (Cancer Platform). This will engage experts at all levels (EU, national, regional, local).
- Mental Health: The Governmental Expert Group on Mental Health met in November 2008 to discuss the implementation of the "European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being". A series of thematic conferences started with an EU-level roundtable on "Reducing the Psychosocial Impact of the Financial and Economic Crisis" held in April 2009. Further conferences will be organised in 2009/2010 in Sweden, Hungary, Spain and Germany.
- Health and environment: The Consultative Group on Environment and Health composed of different stakeholders and the Member State expert working group on indoor air quality met last December preparing a thematic meeting on Healthy Environments (addressing respiratory diseases, obesity and injuries through health promoting environments) organised by the Commission, WHO Europe and the Health Ministry of Luxemburg, which took place in January 2009.
- The HIV/AIDS Member States Think Tank met in March 2009 and discussed forthcoming initiatives at EU and national level. The Commission sub-group on HIV/AIDS aims to provide a platform for cooperation, including preparing a communication on combating HIV/AIDS in the EU and the neighbourhood – Strategy and Second Action Plan 2010-2014 (to be adopted in July 2009).
- Health promotion: The High-level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity met in April 2009 to discuss the Salt reduction initiative, social determinants for obesity and recent developments in the Member States. The Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action discussed in February developments regarding consumption of alcohol and alcohol-related harm, current national policies and the issue of labelling. Discussions continued in the 2nd Open Forum on Alcohol and Health held on 30 April.
- Tobacco/smoke: In July 2008 the Commission submitted a proposal for a directive to raise minimum levels of excise duties on cigarettes, which is currently in co-decision. Cur-

rently the EU textual and pictorial warnings that Member States can introduce on tobacco packs are being revised (planned for discussion in the Tobacco Products Regulatory Committee). Moreover, the Commission is considering the possible review of the Tobacco Products Directive (adopted in 2001). In the near future the Commission intends to put forward a proposal for a Council Recommendation on smoke-free environments and a further initiative on protecting workers from exposure to tobacco smoke is under preparation.

### **Objective 2: Protecting Citizens from Health Threats**

- A (H1N1) flu: EU coordination is continuing under the framework of the Communicable disease decision 2119/98 through the Community Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), under which EU Member States are required to notify measures they propose to take, measures and guidance issued, and any confirmed cases.
- Pandemic flu preparedness: Expert meetings (Health Security Committee) on Member States preparedness took place in November 2008 and April 2009 stressing the need for inter-sectoral preparedness. The Council asked the Commission to draft a communication on the matter, which is expected for 2010. A Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on seasonal flu vaccination is currently under preparation.
- Health Security: The Commission will present in the second half of 2009 a Communication on "Global Health Security - European Union Contribution", which will also be discussed in the sub-group on health security.
- Climate change: The Commission adopted on 1 April 2009 a White Paper on Adaptation to Climate Change, accompanied by a Staff Working Paper on human, animal and plant health impacts of climate change. Given the nature of climate impacts, adaptation will require efforts across all levels of government and must be taken into account in many EU policy areas such as agriculture, health, research, social, water, marine and transport. The White Paper envisages the establishment of an Impact and Adaptation Steering Group (IASG) in order to advance the proposed EU Framework for Adaptation and enhance cooperation. Council conclusions on the White Paper are expected to be adopted on 25 June.

### **Objective 3: Supporting Dynamic Health Systems and new Technologies**

- Cross-border patient's rights: On 23 April the European Parliament approved in first reading the draft report by John Bowis (EPP-ED, UK) on the Commission proposal for a Directive on the application of patient's rights in cross-border healthcare. The proposal aims at giving Europeans the right to seek healthcare abroad more easily and be reimbursed for the costs. It is also considered by the Council and discussed in the Commission Working Group on European Reference Networks (part of the High Level Group on health services and medical care) which will meet again in autumn 2009.
- Quality of healthcare: Based on the discussions of the last meeting on 9 December 2008, the Commission Working Group on Patient Safety and Quality of Care (part of the High Level Group on health services and medical care) has developed terms of reference for its future work, which is included in the annex to this document. This work should result in a reflection paper listing possible policy options regarding EU action on healthcare quality that would be submitted to a consultation in 2010.
- Patient Safety: A Commission Communication and a draft Council Recommendation on Patient Safety were adopted in December 2008. The European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions adopted opinions on the Commission's proposal. The recommendation should be agreed by the EPSCO Council in June. The Commission Working Group on Patient Safety and Quality of Care (part of the High Level Group on health services and medical care) met in April 2009 to discuss the recent developments regarding both initiatives.

- Telemedicine: The Commission adopted in November 2008 a communication on "Telemedicine for the benefit of patients, healthcare systems and society". The implementation includes a series of concrete actions for the Commission and the Member States. A detailed staff working paper complementing the communication will be published soon. (See also: separate document on eHealth)
- Health professionals: A Green paper on the EU workforce for health was published in December 2008. This launched a broad public consultation which had almost 200 responses. Contributions from 16 Member States have been received. The analysis of the responses will help define possible strategies for supporting Member States in tackling health workforce challenges.
- Organs and transplantation: In December 2008 a draft directive and a 10 point Action plan (2009-2015) on quality and safety of standards of human organs intended for transplantation were adopted. A first meeting of national experts took place in March 2009 to discuss the Action plan.