

EuroHealthNet response to the European Commission Green Paper on a European workforce for health

EuroHealthNet is a professionally organised network of the national and regional bodies accountable and responsible for public health and health promotion in EU states, including departments of some national regulatory bodies.

EuroHealthNet strongly supports the response and recommendations submitted by Professor Margaret Barry of the University of Galway on behalf of the International Union of Health Promotion & Education (IUHPE). We will work with IUHPE to disseminate outputs from the EU co-funded project on health promotion competences among professionals and practitioners in member states. We have previously supported work on development of the international Masters in Public Health (EUMAHP project) and liaise with ASPHER and others on future developments in this respect.

We recognise the political sensitivities concerning this process and the relative competences of the EC and member states within the TEU. Nevertheless we welcome the opportunity to restate clearly that health promotion and disease prevention will play a vital part in sustainability of health, social and economic systems within Europe in this century on an evidence led basis. It is essential that the definitions of health systems are accurate and encompassing, as provided in the amended WHO Tallinn Charter signed by EU member states.

Therefore it follows logically and naturally that health promotion education, training, qualifications and competences should be maintained at the highest levels to ensure quality and safety of EU citizens and protection of their rights, not least within Article 179. The realities of cross border rights and movements necessitate an EU dimension alongside appropriate national and professional bodies.

Additionally, EuroHealthNet would wish to emphasise the following:

- Building the capacity of the Health Promotion workforce should be given greater focus and visibility in the development of the health workforce in Europe. As a relatively new multidisciplinary field of practice, there is a greater opportunity for cooperative practices across Member States and this work needs to be further supported.
- The multi sectoral nature of public health and health promotion competences should be provided for. It is and will be increasingly necessary for primary and secondary health care professionals to have an understanding of health equity, social

determinants and psycho social approaches in future to meet national and international objectives. That should be a required component of health practitioner training and competences in all states. In the expectation that the proposed directive on cross border movement of patients will be adopted this becomes more important to achieve objectives of equity, sustainability and quality.

- Similarly, because the EU Health Strategy applies across a wide range (if not all) policy sectors, it should be expected that many other public sector (and some private) professionals should be competent in certain health promotion and disease prevention disciplines, for example those working in the criminal justice and security systems. Given freedom of movement rights that should not be left to local decision which could distort markets and rights within the treaties.
- The roles, training standards and competences of the large numbers of voluntary workers in health and care sectors should be included within considerations of the scope of actions.
- Developing pan-European frameworks for agreeing core competencies and competency-based standards across the health workforce, and specifically in health promotion, should be included as an area for further action in the subsequent proposals.
- The role of the higher education sector and professional bodies in delivering high quality education and training of health specialists based on agreed competencies and standards should be given greater prominence in the areas for further action.
- Continuing Professional Development will be vital in working environments. This must not only meet common high quality criteria and standards, but must be accessible to encourage career flexibility among other professionals.
- The proposed Code of Conduct in ethical recruitment and managing worker migration should be developed with a view to also applying this to the ethical recruitment of students in all health and related disciplines in European Universities.
- The collection of accurate and comparable data on the health workforce and their qualifications should be supported at the European level.

- EC work in this field should be “joined up”, with particular regard to the current consultation on potential actions to address health inequalities and other public health strategies, not only health system or market management legislation.
- As a final aside, the use of the term “workforce” could be considered inappropriate given the committed and caring nature of these professional people. As a constructive force for good it is acceptable, but inadvertent connotations should be considered.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment: we look forward to future proposals and will be happy to provide further information on request.

As always, EuroHealthNet is a voluntary network. This collective response has been subject to internal consultation, but members and partners may wish to reserve the right to express specific views which may differ, and we support their right to do so.

Clive Needle

EuroHealthNet

Brussels 31.03.09.

This paper represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumers DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.