

Obesity Round Table 18 November 2004:

Conclusions

1. The chairman (Robert Madelin, Director General, DG SANCO) stated that due to the delayed start of the new Commission, the Round Table process was slightly lagging behind schedule. The hearings and other interventions of Commissioner-designate Markos Kyprianou have however shown that nutrition, physical activity and obesity are all issues that appear to rank high amongst his priorities. Therefore, Mr. Kyprianou, once confirmed in his position, can be expected to register very positively any input towards addressing these issues coming from the Round Table.
2. Regarding the results of the Best Practices Workshop of 29 October, the chairman stated that while there are still uncertainties and points of disagreement, there is also a great deal of common ground. The Round Table process so far confirms SANCO's working hypothesis that by putting committed and responsible players together, it is possible to identify solutions with a strong potential for generating positive health outcomes which are viable for all partners concerned. The main challenges are:
 - to agree how to do more, and do it more quickly;
 - to agree how players can talk earlier, and more effectively, about what they plan to do;
 - to share experience more systematically.
3. The chairman underlined the need to go beyond the present Round Table process in the future: Presently, most action in the obesity prevention area is spontaneous and unilateral, and deprives other potential partners of participation and validation opportunities, which diminishes the actual value added. In order for the European Union to contribute to non-legislative action on a broad basis, there is a need to create a systematic and transparent process where
 - outcomes from individual actors' performance can be reported and reviewed, experience can be pooled and synergies can be created;
 - firm commitments for action will be made;
 - such commitments will be validated and receive credit as appropriate.
4. After formal agreement of such an approach by the new Commissioner, the Commission services will explore with Member States and the European Parliament if they consider the concept of such a "European Platform for Action on Nutrition for Health" a legitimate step to take, and if the other main institutions are willing to support and contribute to such a Platform. The success of such an approach will ultimately depend on the stakeholders' willingness to take higher risks and enter into stronger commitments.
5. Feedback from the Round Table participants on the proposed Platform approach was very positive: all stakeholders declared in principle to be willing to take an active part in the Platform, and to be ready to make commitments.
6. The need for a multi-stakeholder character of the Platform with broad participation and coverage of a vast array of issues, including physical activity, was underlined.
7. The Platform will also need to look into nutrition and physical activity issues in other Community policies, such as education, agriculture and research, and involve the European Food Safety Authority.

8. Regarding concerns that European umbrella organisations may not always be in a position to guarantee the adherence of their entire membership to commitments that could be made within the framework of the Platform, the chairman referred to the possibility of flexible solutions (e. g. a European association of economic operators committing members representing at least 85% of its turnover).
9. Concerning the relationship of the Platform with other processes, such as the European Network on Nutrition and Physical Activity on the one hand, and with the ongoing legislative activities (in particular health & nutrition claims and nutrition labelling) on the other hand, the chairman referred to the concept of “parallel processing”: the Platform is not intended to be a closed shop or otherwise exclusive, but should rather be seen as “illuminating” and smoothing out other processes.
10. The next meeting of the Obesity Round Table, scheduled for 14 December, will go into more detail on the shape of the Platform; participants will receive a discussion paper on the Platform process during the second week of December.