



JOINT LETTER FROM EPHA AND EPF on the Mid-term Review of Europe 2020

**The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
The European Patients' Forum (EPF)**

Dear President Barroso,

We are writing on behalf of the European Public Health Alliance and the European Patients' Forum with regard to the progress achieved under Europe 2020.

To achieve the goals of Europe 2020, significant emphasis is needed on social cohesion, to renew faith in the European process at a time of increasing disenchantment with austerity policies that impact disproportionately on vulnerable groups.

We are concerned that the financial and economic crisis has had major adverse health and social impacts throughout the EU that have increased existing inequalities.

EPHA – Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health – is the European Platform bringing together public health organisations representing professional groups, patients, health promotion and disease specific NGOs and other health associations.

EPF is the collective patients' voice at EU level, currently representing 63 member organisations, which are chronic disease-specific patient organisations active at European level, and national coalitions of patient organisations. Collectively, EPF reflect the voice of over 150 million patients living with various chronic diseases in the European Union.

In our view the **absence of 'equity'** and **the limited role for the health** sector have been critical gaps in Europe 2020. We now have an opportunity to **address these gaps.**

Within the review process the health community calls for a strong commitment to strengthening the health and equity dimensions throughout the three objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy – smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. **We encourage the review process to include a strategy to work with civil society** and highlight that on 7 June 2011, the Council called for the health sector to play a key role in the implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy.

We welcome the fact that the current Strategy acknowledges the contribution health makes to social cohesion and economic productivity, as well as the 2020 goal "to undertake an assessment of the adequacy and sustainability of social protection and pension systems and identify ways to ensure better access to health care systems". However, we regret that the only tool included in the strategy

is structural reforms, in particular of pension, health care, social protection and education systems with the sole goal of ensuring long-term financial sustainability. Health system reforms should aim explicitly to achieve high quality of care that meets people's needs, through health literacy and equity of access. The overarching European values of universality, access to good quality care, equity and solidarity should be the underlying principles of any health system reform. Reforms should be **people-centred**, and **evidence-based**, through health impact assessment, and include a targeted approach to identify and address inefficiencies in health systems.

The mid-term review is an **opportunity to promote new ways of measuring social progress**. The Lisbon Strategy included the objective of extending healthy life years. The European Parliament in its resolution on the NCD summit called on EU Member States to endorse a target of the reduction of preventable NCD mortality by 25% by 2025, as proposed by World Health Organization. More recently, the European Parliament called for the inclusion of access to healthcare in the social dimension of the EMU.

Public Health is key for reaching the goals of EU 2020

For strengthening the health and equity dimension throughout the Strategy, we have some preliminary suggestions.

- With regard to the poverty target, the fight against health inequalities, the increased rates of poverty for people living with disabilities or chronic conditions, as well as the accessibility and affordability of healthcare should be included.
- The education target should incorporate health literacy, quality and inclusive education and the promotion of gender equality, early life development support, and continuous professional development for health workers.
- The target for 3% of GDP invested in research and development should also be used to address unmet public health needs in research, and for the creation of safe and effective, affordable and accessible health technologies including vaccines, diagnostics, and drugs. This would contribute to the right to health for all.
- The employment target should also address the challenges faced by people living with chronic illnesses, mental health problems and disabilities in obtaining and retaining employment. The employment target could be used to address the shortages of health professionals with a comprehensive, sustainable approach including planning and forecasting, recruitment and retention, skill mix and creating attractive working conditions. Ethical recruitment must be fostered, and the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel must be implemented.
- The employment target should also address absenteeism and precariousness of work. Absenteeism is a result of many dimensions, which could be minor or chronic illness, depression and stress, caring for a sick or elderly relative, workplace bullying and bereavement, or alcohol related harm. Quality employment is vital for health and therefore, fair employment and good working conditions for all are critical.

Strategies to accompany the mid-term review of Europe 2020

We urge you to accompany the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy with the Health Strategy, the Strategy on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity, the Alcohol Strategy, and the HIV/AIDS Strategy, and call on the College of Commissioners to follow up on EU action on chronic diseases with a strategy and action plan. It is necessary to support member states with the tools to tackle the

major challenges they are facing, including an ageing population, the increasing incidence of chronic illnesses, changing needs and expectations of patients, and health workforce shortages.

Impact assessment is an obligation of the Union under the Treaty. **We would also encourage you to use this review as an opportunity to strengthen the role of health impact assessment.** This is crucial to ensure that all union policies and activities ensure a high level of protection of human health as provided by Article 168 of the Treaty and Article 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Notwithstanding the EU's limited competence in the field of health, other policies outside the health sector, such as advertising, industrial policy, the common agriculture policy, and budgetary decisions all have impacts on health per se, and indeed the quality of life of patients with chronic diseases and complex conditions.

Health policy is an area that adds value to people's lives, and it is critical to the success of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Constituting 10% of EU GDP, the health sector has considerable potential for innovation, and an important role to play in meeting societal challenges and expectations. Health, after all, is not only a by-product of economic growth, but one of its key components. Good health contributes to better overall outcomes in productivity; investment in health promotion, disease/injury prevention and high quality health services act as a driver for wealth and development.¹ **We ask that this be reflected in the mid-term review.**

Adequate involvement of public health and patient organisations is crucial to reaching the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy. We ask the Commission to develop **guidelines on consultation with and involvement of civil society in the process of the European Semester.**

However, we would remind the European Institutions that health is a fundamental right in itself, and should not be seen solely as a tool to promote growth. Economic growth and innovation should be tools to improve the lives of people living in Europe. In the debate about the EU priorities from 2015 to 2020, EPHA and EPF encourage the European Institutions to promote people's health and well-being and focus on social cohesion beyond the promotion of economic growth.

Health and equity are pre-requisites for the success of Europe 2020. We offer our support and commitment in moving forward together on the proposals outlined above.



Peggy Maguire, President
European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)



Anders Olauson, President
European Patients' Forum (EPF)

¹European Commission "The Contribution of Health to the Economy in the European Union"; Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion 2007-2013.