

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## EQUITY OF ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE

### Second Conference on Health Inequalities with a focus on the 'New' Member States and candidate countries

**Brussels, 21 June 2013 – Access to healthcare is a fundamental citizen's right. However health disparities still exist and are even more put at risk with the economic crisis and austerity measures.**

The Bulgarian National Patients' Organization (NPO), with the support of the European Patients' Forum (EPF), organises a conference titled "*Health Inequalities in the 'New' EU Member States and Candidate Countries - Equity of Access to Quality Healthcare*" in recognition of the urgency of these issues.

The conference will be hosted by Dr Andrey Kovatchev, MEP at the European Parliament on 26 June. Members of the European Parliament, EU health policy makers and experts, patient and industry representatives will attend this event. They will have the opportunity to reiterate the importance of collaboration and partnership for equity of access to quality healthcare and social welfare. They will also discuss possible solutions such as establishing a European Partnership for equity of access to quality healthcare. This partnership would provide a platform to combine the efforts of authorities, stakeholders and industry to identify possible new mechanisms for ensuring that patients have access to affordable and quality healthcare.

The first session will build on the lessons learned from the first conference on Health Inequalities which took place in September 2012 in Sofia, Bulgaria. NPO Chairperson and member of the EPF Board, Dr. Stanimir Hasardzhiev, will present the outcomes of this *First Conference* to see how we could further contribute to reduce health inequalities to the benefit of all EU citizens.

Ms. Emily Peasgood, Marketing Researcher at INCITE Research, UK, will present the official results of the patients' survey on health inequalities. This project was initiated as a follow-up of the conference by NPO and EPF to assess concrete and up-to-date data on the direct impact of inequalities on patients' well-being. It was conducted in the twelve new EU Member States and the three candidate countries and approximately 300 patient advocates participated.

Furthermore the conference will highlight case studies on sustainable pricing. Mr. Achim Kautz, Policy Director of the European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA) will look at hepatitis' case and Mr. Erik Briers, Executive Director of the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC) at oncology.

The following session will explore ways to create equity of access in treatment and care in the EU Member States. Panelists will share their insights on the possible solutions to expanding access to quality healthcare throughout Europe. Representatives of the Bulgarian Ministry of Health, DG SANCO and the Belgian National Institute of Health & Disability Insurance (RIZIV) will focus on collaboration opportunities between EU Member States, on the ways to expand access to medicines as well as on the efforts of the EU Institutions to reduce health inequalities.

The conference will conclude with a discussion panel. Leading policy-makers and experts will explore opportunities for influencing European policies in consideration not only of economic factors but also of health indicators to ensure equity of access to quality healthcare throughout Europe.

As a follow-up of the conference, leading MEPs' champions for patients' rights, will establish an informal group to discuss suitable strategic actions and future activities to ensure equity of access to quality healthcare.

The **National Patients' Organization (NPO)** was founded in January 2010 as an association of patient organizations. NPO is registered under the Law for legal entities as a nonprofit organization carrying out activities for the public's benefit. As the largest association of patient NGO organizations in Bulgaria NPO have almost 80 members – 33 full members involved in the most significant diseases and 45 partner organizations in all 28 regional towns of Bulgaria.

[www.npo.bg](http://www.npo.bg)

The European Patients' Forum (EPF) was founded in 2003 to become the collective patients' voice at EU level, manifesting the solidarity, power and unity of the EU patients' movement. EPF currently represents 61 member organisations - which are chronic disease specific patient organisations working at European level, and national coalitions of patients organisations. EPF reflects the voice of an estimated 150 million patients affected by various diseases throughout Europe.

EPF's vision for the future is high quality, patient-centred, equitable healthcare throughout the European Union.

[www.eu-patient.eu](http://www.eu-patient.eu)

#### Contact Persons:

Gergana Yaneva, NPO Project Officer at [gergana.y@npo.bg](mailto:gergana.y@npo.bg) or at +359 879 44 99 81

Nicola Bedlington, EPF Executive Director at [nicola.bedlington@eu-patient.eu](mailto:nicola.bedlington@eu-patient.eu) or at +43 699 110 64 169