

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EQUITY OF ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE

Establishment of an EU partnership and an MEP interest group to reduce health inequalities

Brussels, 28 June 2013 – The second conference on *“Health Inequalities in the ‘New’ EU Member States and Candidate Countries”* held at the European Parliament on 26 June 2013 produced high impact results. Dr Andrey Kovatchev, MEP, hosting the meeting, will lead in the setting up of an interest group of MEPs to address health inequalities and to promote equal access. The meeting also laid the foundations for the establishment of an EU partnership on patient access and equity.

“Access to high quality healthcare is a fundamental citizen’s right. However patients leaders are very aware that disparities in access exist and are even more pronounced due to the economic crisis and austerity measure” said Dr. Stanimir Hasardzhiev from National Patients’ Organization (NPO), Bulgaria. This emerged from official results of the **patients’ survey on health inequalities** initiated as a follow-up of the first conference on the same theme. 256 patient advocates responded to this research conducted in the 12 new EU Member States and the three candidate countries.



“Inequalities start with early detection”, explained Eric Briers, Secretary of Europa Uomo, the European Prostate Cancer Coalition. The education of patients indeed plays a decisive role in the detection of their condition and they are not equally equipped to act consequently. This further applies to the inequalities in terms of services, equipment, treatment, etc. Achim Kautz, Policy Director at the European Liver Patients’ Association, also highlighted the fact that even where good medication exists, accessing it appropriately remains a core issue for many patients.

Ms. Dessislava Dimitrova, Chair of the Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee, proposed the establishment of a European Partnership for equity of access to quality healthcare as one way forward. EPF will develop this idea and initiate **consultation process with EU and health stakeholders**.

Leading MEPs’ champions for patients’ rights announced the **launch of an interest group** that will aim at reducing health inequalities while fighting for high quality accessible healthcare. They want to reiterate the urgency of the situation which is a European problem, not only existing in the new EU member states and candidate countries.

MEP Antonia Parvanova called for **health to be included in the Treaty of the European Union** to make sure everyone takes up the cause. She said she will dedicate all her expertise to reach such an ambitious goal.

Nicola Bedlington, EPF Executive Director concluded *“This conference has been a real milestone in putting access and equity issues for patients on the agenda and decision makers and the health community moving forward together real solutions to put an end to the unacceptable and dramatic situation faced by many patients across the EU.”*

More information about the conference

The conference was hosted by Dr Andrey Kovatchev, MEP at the European Parliament, and organised by the Bulgarian National Patients' Organization (NPO), with the support of the European Patients' Forum (EPF). Members of the European Parliament, EU health policy makers and experts, patient and industry representatives attended this event.

The first conference on this theme was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 21-22 September 2012 and concluded with the adoption of a [Resolution by the participants](#). The document recalled the importance of health inequalities as a main political priority and reflected also the will to look at the discrepancies among the EU members' states with regards to access to healthcare and the quality of care. Finally the Resolution paved the way for a wider debate in regard to better access to treatment and encouraged interaction and collaboration among all stakeholders.

The second conference has therefore followed this resolution up with more concrete actions taken.

More information about the survey

The survey was made to assess the 'Impact on Healthcare' amongst patients' organisations in the new EU member states and candidate countries. The objective of the research was to hear the views of patients and carers about the impact, if any, that there has been on the healthcare situation in their country, since joining the EU.

The survey results illustrate that:

- 74% of respondents¹ stated that "Due to the economic crisis, the Government is decreasing the budget for healthcare"
- 68% of respondents² stated that "Due to the economic crisis, the burden on patients for co-payment for treatment is increasing"
- 56% of respondents³ stated that "Due to the economic crisis, the number of new drugs which enter the market is decreasing"
- 49% of respondents⁴ feel that waiting time for treatment (medicines, products and services) has worsened since joining the EU
- 97% of the respondents⁵ stated that ensuring sustainable funding of the healthcare system is an access and quality issue that needs to be addressed urgently
- 93% of the respondents⁶ stated that "improving the waiting time for treatment (medicines, products and services) is an access and quality issue that needs to be addressed urgently"

All the results will be soon available on NPO website but please contact NPO for more information.

¹ Those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statements

² Those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statements

³ Those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statements

⁴ Those who said it has significantly/slightly worsened

⁵ Those who answered it was very/fairly urgent

⁶ Those who answered it was very/fairly urgent

More information about the conference organisers

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

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

For more information, please contact:

- Gergana Yaneva, NPO Project Officer at gergana.y@npo.bg or at +359 879 44 99 81
- Nicola Bedlington, EPF Executive Director at nicola.bedlington@eu-patient.eu or at +43 699 110 64 169