



[Press release] Ball is in Council's court to end health discrimination

Brussels, 18 March 2014 – The multiple forms of health and other discrimination faced by patients with chronic diseases and vulnerable groups, as well as the political commitment needed to combat this, were the focus of *'Health in Europe, making it fairer'* (1) – a landmark conference organised today by the European Union's Directorate General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) in Brussels. The patient and public health community congratulates Health Commissioner Borg for this key event and will support the efforts of DG SANCO to work on this topic under the next European Commission.

This conference comes during a transition period for Europe with the elections for the European Parliament happening in two months. In an election manifesto, the European Patients' Forum (EPF) calls on candidates for the European Parliament to commit to breaking down access barriers, as access also means non-discrimination (2). EPHA's manifesto encourages the future Parliament to create an inclusive, sustainable society (3) and urges MEPs to push for the adoption of a Council Directive on the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender, race, type of condition, social status, education, or country of residence. Today's conference sends a strong message to the Council of Ministers to break the gridlock and swiftly adopt the Directive.

"EU and Member States' equal treatment legislation should protect patients and citizens from discrimination based on health status or chronic conditions in all areas of their life, as they are often left unprotected by the law, (4)" said Nicola Bedlington, EPF Executive Director (4).

Europe has a long way to go if it is to live up to its pledges to improve the health and living standards of people living on low income and individuals with chronic diseases. The fight against health inequalities and the skyrocketing rates of poverty among people with disabilities (5) or chronic conditions (6) must be at the heart of the Europe 2020 Strategy (7).

The EU can take action to ensure better accessibility and affordability of healthcare, which must become a right for all, and not merely the privilege of the few. For this reason, the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and the European Patients' Forum (EPF) called on Commission President Barroso in an open letter (8) to strengthen the health and equity dimensions in the 2020 Strategy and to further engage civil society. Patient empowerment and health literacy are cornerstones in this regard.

"Non-discrimination requires action at EU level rooted in firm political commitment. This conference is a well-intentioned first step that will mean little if there is not a

framework or process to continue the momentum, *such as a joint EU action on discrimination,*” concluded Peggy Maguire, President of EPHA and Director General of the European Institute of Women’s Health.

- **Notes to editors**

- (1) [This major conference addressed the issue of improving fairness and equity in health in Europe](#), improving access to health and combating discrimination in health.
- (2) [EPF Campaign for the 2014 EU Elections - Patients + Participations = Our Vote for a Healthier Europe](#)
- (3) [EPHA Manifesto for the European Parliament Elections](#)
- (4) [European Patients Forum \(EPF\) Strategic Plan 2014-2020](#)
- (5) A [study on the impact of austerity on the rights of people with disabilities](#) found that more than 1 out of 5 persons with disabilities (21.1%) are at risk of poverty in the EU compared to people without disabilities (14.9 %). The poverty risk rates sharply increased between 2008 and 2010 in several countries, namely Ireland (+26.16%), Denmark (+21.27%), Lithuania (+21.01%), Spain (+11.35%), Cyprus (+8.11%), Hungary (+6.03%) and Malta (+5.10%).
- (6) [The study ‘The Global Burden of Disease: Generating Evidence, Guiding Policy — Europe and Central Asia’](#) found that chronic disease and a gender gap in health are taking a growing toll. Premature mortality and illness from non-communicable diseases, such as ischemic heart disease, cirrhosis, and diabetes, increased over the past two decades, and drug and alcohol use disorders are causing more early deaths and disability than two decades ago.
- (7) [The Europe 2020 Strategy](#) was launched in 2010 to promote ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’. [The Commission released a mid-term review on Europe 2020](#) that will orientate the debate and gives a snapshot of progress achieved to date.
- (8) [Joint open letter] [Health actors write to Barroso proposing stronger health dimension](#)

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