Together for health: a strategic approach for the EU 2008-2013

2008/2115(INI) - 09/09/2008

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own initiative report by Alojz **PETERLE** (EPP-ED, SI) in response to the Commission's White Paper entitled 'Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013'.

MEPs welcome the Commission's White Paper and support the values, principles, strategic goals and specific actions set out therein. Nevertheless, they deplore the fact that the White Paper does not set specific quantifiable and measurable objectives whose attainment could produce tangible results, and recommends that such objectives be adopted.

Prevention: according to the WHO, chronic diseases and particularly strokes and heart disease are steadily overtaking infectious diseases. Against this background, MEPs recommend the widespread adoption of the practice of performing health impact assessments, as the impact on human health of the decisions of decision-making bodies at various levels including local and regional authorities and national parliaments is measurable. The report stresses that action plans should address, in particular, the causes of certain diseases and the need to reduce and prevent epidemics and pandemics. MEPs believe that disease prevention efforts and vaccination campaigns, where effective products exist, should be stepped up significantly. The Commission is therefore urged to draw up an **ambitious plan for preventive actions** for the entire 5-year period. MEPs stress that the desire to prevent diseases must not lead to a climate in society that would prevent children with a chronic disease or a disability from being born.

Reduce inequalities: MEPs propose that the Commission set as a priority goal a reduction in avoidable health inequalities and inequities between and within Member States, as well as between different social groups and sections of the population, including men and those with mental health problems. They stress that actions aimed at reducing inequities in health should include targeted promotion, public education and prevention programmes. The Commission and the Member States are called upon to consider the contribution which **integrated social and health policies** (socially relevant health service provision) could make to a modern approach to the promotion and protection of health, particularly for the most vulnerable sections of the population such as young children and those who are not self-sufficient. MEPs expect the Commission to pay particular attention to the question of the sustainability of health systems and, in that context, also to the role and responsibility of the pharmaceutical industry.

Transparency and reliable information: MEPs stress that access to reliable, independent and comparable information about healthy behaviours, diseases and treatment options is a prerequisite for an effective disease prevention strategy. They stress furthermore that, in order to promote investment in health, it is vital to measure the effectiveness of investments to date and to publish the findings.

Improved research on health: the report stresses the importance of carrying out well-organised, comprehensive and effective screening programmes to facilitate the early detection and immediate treatment of disease, thereby reducing the associated mortality and morbidity. The Commission and the Member States are invited to explore further, in the framework of the strategy, the synergies between scientific and technological research, particularly as regards new kinds of research in medical areas that are currently under-funded.

Healthy living: MEPs stress that the concept of 'healthy lifestyle' (i.e. a healthy diet, the absence of drug abuse and sufficient physical activity) needs to be complemented by a psychosocial dimension (i.e. a

balanced approach to work and family life). They stress the need to highlight key health-related issues, such as nutrition, obesity, malnutrition, physical activity, consumption of alcohol, drugs and tobacco and environmental risks. In this context, the Commission is urged to take a more holistic approach to nutrition and make malnutrition, alongside obesity, a key priority in the field of health, incorporating it wherever possible into EU-funded research, education and health promotion initiatives and EU-level partnerships. They believe that action to promote healthy lifestyles in families, schools, hospitals, care homes, workplaces and places of leisure is essential to successful disease prevention and good mental health. MEPs recognise that the family is of vital importance in establishing a 'healthy lifestyle' model which is often replicated in later life.

Antibiotics: the report demands effective measures to combat antibiotic resistance including measures to make **antibiotics prescription only**, guidelines to decrease the prescription of antibiotics to limit it to cases in which the use of an antibiotic is indeed necessary, efforts to improve marker tests in order to encourage a more cautious use of antibiotics, and, where appropriate, hygiene codes. MEPs call for special attention to be paid to the methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bacteria.

Combating counterfeited medicines: MEPs welcome the approach proposed by the Commission with a view to combating effectively the counterfeiting of medicines and encourages the Commission to promote the drafting of an international convention on this subject.

Improved cooperation: MEPs welcome the Commission’s proposal to set up an EU-level structured cooperation mechanism and to establish closer cooperation with stakeholders. They call on the Member States, along with regional and local authorities, to use the cooperation mechanism to improve the exchange of best practice. They agree that actions under the Strategy must be supported by existing financial instruments until the end of the current Financial Framework (2007-2013), without additional budgetary consequences.

Human body: MEPs stress that the prohibition on making the human body and its parts as such a source of financial gain (as mentioned in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) should be considered a guiding principle in the area of health, especially in the field of cell, tissue and organ donation and transplantation.

Other targeted measures: MEPs call on the Commission and the Member States, in the framework of the EU's health strategy, to work towards the development of guidelines for a common definition of disability (which may include people with chronic illnesses or cancer); to strengthen measures ensuring that persons with disabilities are given equal access to health care; to provide more effective exchanges of best practices within the EU in all areas of health-care provision, in particular in relation to screening programmes and the diagnosis and treatment of serious illnesses such as cancer; to **increase public awareness** of reproductive and sexual health in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and reduce the social and health problems caused by infertility; to improve health care and information for pregnant and breastfeeding women concerning the risks associated with alcohol, drug and tobacco consumption during pregnancy and breastfeeding; to protect health care workers from accidents and injury in the workplace…

Role and impact of the ECDC: lastly, MEPs recommend that the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) be extended to non-communicable diseases.