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

2008/2115(INI) - 23/10/2007 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present a White Paper setting out an EU Health Strategy from 2008-2013.

BACKGROUND: the EU's important role in health policy has been reaffirmed in the Reform Treaty which was agreed by EU Heads of State and Government in Lisbon on 19 October 2007 and which proposes to reinforce the political importance of health. A new overall aim on supporting citizens' wellbeing is expected, as well as an encouragement of cooperation amongst Member States on health and health services. The European Union is facing new challenges. Its population is ageing fast and its recent enlargements widened the health gaps between Member States. Migration, the mobility of health professionals and patients, the risks posed by pandemics and bioterrorism all represent additional challenges. So do globalisation and climate change. The time has come for the EU to develop a strong and comprehensive strategy on Health. The new strategy will help enable Member States to meet a wide range of common challenges based on shared principles and values.

CONTENT: tackling these challenges and responding to these calls requires a long-term approach. This White Paper aims to set out a comprehensive and coherent framework - a first EU Health Strategy - to give direction to Community activities in health. It provides for concrete new actions aiming, among other things, to strengthen European defences against health threats, to increase prevention and early diagnosis of cancer and to equip citizens with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their health. It proposes **four core principles underpinning three strategic objectives** as a focus of attention for the coming years. The Strategy also sets out implementation mechanisms for cooperation between partners, reinforcing Health in All Policies, and increasing visibility and understanding about health at Community level. This White Paper sets out a Strategy until 2013, when a review will take place to support the definition of further actions towards the objectives.

Principles: the White Paper sets out a number of cross-cutting **principles** such as solidarity, citizen participation in policy-making and the need to reduce inequities in health, to promote investment in health, to mainstream health in all policies, and to strengthen the EU's voice in Global Health. To live up to its principles and achieve its objectives, the Strategy sets out a framework under which actions can be taken. The White Paper foresees concrete priority actions for the next two years.

Objectives: in short, the Health Strategy aims to:

1) Foster Good Health in an Ageing Europe by promoting good health throughout the lifespan: p opulation ageing, resulting from low birth rates and increasing longevity, is now well established. By 2050 the number of people in the EU aged 65+ will grow by 70%. The 80+ age group will grow by 170%. A ctions required to support this objective include: i) measures to promote the health of older people and the workforce and actions on children's and young people's health (Commission); ii) development and delivery of actions on tobacco, nutrition, alcohol, mental health and other broader environmental and socioeconomic factors affecting health (Commission, Member States); iii) new Guidelines on Cancer screening and a Communication on European Action in the Field of Rare Diseases (Commission); Follow up of the Communication on organ donation and transplantation (Commission).

2) Protect Citizens from Health Threats including communicable diseases, bioterrorism, and patient safety: Community-level work includes scientific risk assessment, preparedness and response to epidemics and bioterrorism, strategies to tackle risks from specific diseases and conditions, action on

accidents and injuries, improving workers' safety, and actions on food safety and consumer protection. The Commission will continue this work, but will also focus on challenges that have not yet been fully addressed. Actions required to support this objective include: i) strengthen mechanisms for surveillance and response to health threats, including review of the remit of the European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (Commission); ii) health aspects on adaptation to climate change (Commission).

3) Support Dynamic Health Systems and New Technologies: EU Health systems are under mounting pressure to respond the challenges of population ageing, citizens' rising expectations, migration, and mobility of patients and health professionals. New technologies have the potential to revolutionise healthcare and health systems. E-health, genomics and biotechnologies can improve prevention of illness, delivery of treatment, and support a shift from hospital care to prevention and primary care. E-Health can help to provide better citizen-centred care as well as lowering costs and supporting interoperability across national boundaries, facilitating patient mobility and safety. To boost investment in health systems, health has been integrated into instruments aimed at enhancing EU growth, employment and innovation including the Lisbon strategy, the 7thFramework Programme for Research including the Joint Technology Initiative on Innovative Medicines, the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme and Regional Policy. However, further action is needed, e.g. in relation to the capacities of regions, which are key actors in delivering healthcare. Actions required are as follows: i) Community framework for safe, high quality and efficient health services (Commission) Support Member States and Regions in managing innovation in health systems (Commission); ii) support implementation and interoperability of e-health solutions in health systems (Commission).

The actions in this Strategy will be supported by **existing financial instruments** until the end of the current financial framework (2013), without additional budgetary consequences. The annual work plans of the newly adopted Second Programme of Community Action in the Field of Health will be a key instrument to support the Strategy's objectives. It should be noted that this programme replaces the current Public Health Programme (2003–2008), and has three broad aims: improving citizens' health security, promoting health for prosperity and solidarity, and generating and disseminating health knowledge.

Lastly, to implement the Strategy in close co-operation with the Member States and other key players, the White Paper foresees the creation of a **structured co-operation mechanism**. It will identify priorities, define indicators, facilitate the exchange of good practice, produce guidelines and recommendations and measure progress.