Modernising social protection and developing good quality healthcare

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Milan CABRNOCH (EPP-ED, CZ) in response to the Commission paper on modernising social protection and developing good quality healthcare using the 'open method of coordination'. Starting from the premise that the right to health is a basic social right and that public health is one of society's values and maintaining it is one of society's most important tasks, MEPs endorsed the three main objectives proposed as the basis for the open method of coordination: universal access independent of income or wealth, high-quality care and long-term financial sustainability. They stressed that, under the open method of coordination, the "absolute sovereignty" of national (and where appropriate, regional) governments in the field of health care must be fully respected.

The report pointed out that health is affected by many factors, including genetic predisposition, lifestyle and social situation. It added that preventive care was the most effective and efficient form of health care and contributed to the long-term financial sustainability of care systems. Prevention should therefore be given a "perceptibly higher" priority in the actual use of services, including regular preventive medical examinations.

The committee stressed that the main role in any system of health care and long-term care must be played by the individual as a beneficiary of services and a "care consumer" and that he or she must therefore have access to maximum information. It also said that the ageing of the population was a challenge, and that the healthcare of the "frail elderly" was an appropriate area for research at the European level. Nevertheless, the ageing of the population should also be taken as an opportunity for people with long and valuable experience to be involved more closely in society and enterprises as part of active ageing.

The report raised a number of other points, such as the importance of health care, long-term care and social care in national economies owing to the large number of jobs involved, the need to recruit and retain health care workers and make these professions more attractive and the need to deal with the health requirements of the poorest members of society. It also voiced concern at the substantial differences between the old and the new Member States in terms of the health status of their population and access to health care and long-term care. Lastly, it called on the Commission to submit a new report on the health situation of women in the EU.