Health: Community action programme 2008-2013

2005/0042A(COD) - 06/04/2005 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : proposal to establish a Programme of Community action in the field of Health and Consumer protection 2007-2013 to improve EU citizens' quality of life in terms of their health and their consumer interests.

PROPOSED ACT : Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT : the proposal and the Commission's Communication bring together Public Health and Consumer protection policies and programmes under one framework. This is due to the fact that many objectives of health and consumer actions under Treaty articles 152 and 153 are shared: promoting health protection, information and education, safety and integration of health and consumer concerns into all policies. Health and consumer policies also use many similar types of actions to pursue their objectives e. g. information to citizens, consultation of stakeholders, mainstreaming activities, risk assessment. Bringing the two areas together will thus lead to greater policy coherence, economies of scale and increased visibility.

The EU, national and regional authorities, citizens, businesses and civil society have a role to play in improving the health, wellbeing and welfare of European citizens. There are, however, several shared health and consumer policy challenges that only action at EU level can tackle. Greater mobility and more communication have benefited citizens. But they have also increased the risk of spreading health threats such as SARS and other communicable diseases (which cannot be addressed by individual Member States alone) and scams e.g. from bogus lotteries. The complexity of modern life has brought more choice for citizens. But it has also made it harder for them to make the best choices.

The proposed strategy and programme aim to implement articles 152 and 153 of the Treaty as regards Community action on health and consumer protection, by complementing national action with value-added measures which cannot be taken at national level. Bringing health and consumer protection under a common framework will lead to important synergies in terms of objectives and actions, and enhance policy coherence. Merging the two programmes will also streamline administrative procedures (with a common set of tools and a unified budget) and increase visibility of policy actions vis-à-vis European citizens and within the EU institutions.

EU Health and Consumer policies have three core joint objectives:

- Protect citizens from risks and threats which are beyond the control of individuals and that cannot be effectively and completely tackled by individual Member States alone.

- Increase the ability of citizens to take better decisions about their health and consumer interests. This means increasing the opportunities they have to exercise real choice and also equipping them with the knowledge they need.

- Mainstream health and consumer policy objectives across all Community policies in order to put health and consumer issues at the centre of policy-making. The EU Treaty recognises this by requiring that all policies take health and consumer interests into account.

With regard to health, the Programme reinforces the three strands of the Public Health Programme (information, threats and determinants), and creates three new ones: response to threats, disease prevention and co-operation between health systems. Annex II to the proposal provides an exhaustive list of actions planned under each strand.

With regard to consumer protection, the proposal foresees that a European Consumer Institute created within the single executive agency of the programme will be the cornerstone for implementing the actions. Implementing the programme and managing the additional resources means efficient and structured organisation. The proposal discusses the extension of the Health Executive Agency to include a consumer department as the most cost effective way of proceeding.

Four strands of actions are foreseen:

-Better understanding of consumers and markets. This includes developing and updating its scientific knowledge base and assessment tools on consumer exposure to chemicals, including with respect to general product safety, and to contribute to the application of REACH.

- Better consumer protection regulation;

- Better enforcement, monitoring and redress;

- Better informed and educated consumers.

Actions will contribute to ensure an equally high level of protection for all EU consumers, wherever they live, travel to or buy from in the EU, from risks and threats to their interests. Action covers the safety of goods and services; the fairness of commercial practices and contractual rights for consumers; affordable access to essential services, protection from rogue traders and access to effective means of redress. Actions will also contribute to increase the capacity of consumers to promote their own interests, as individuals or though consumer organisations, i.e., helping consumers help themselves. This includes the provision of information to consumers about their rights, means of redress but also products and the opportunities of the internal market.

For further information concerning the financial implications of this measure, please refer to the financial statement.