

To the Heads of State and of Government



Europe's Future should be Healthy

Addressing the health of Europe is key to achieving the mission and values of the EU. In today's enlarged Europe, reducing health inequalities will foster greater cohesion and solidarity amongst Member States. European citizens want health to be on the agenda.

On its 50th birthday, it is clear that the founding vision of the European Union as a force for peace and democracy has been a success. In addition, this unique union has brought stability for its most recent members. The health of Europe has also improved. Life expectancy has increased and certain diseases have been eradicated/controlled. With this in mind, the future of Europe should be healthy. However, fifty years on, Europe is facing new challenges. Demographic change, migration, globalisation, and climate change all have implications for the health of European citizens.

Health is a fundamental and universal human right which is recognised in the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as a number of international treaties and protocols. The right to health is the right of every human being. As such, the European Union has an important role to play in helping to address health challenges both domestically and internationally.

The enlarged European Union is the largest economic and political bloc in the world and should provide leadership on global issues. The credibility of the European Union's positions on trade, environment, development and international health issues rests upon a clear focus and priority on public health in the Berlin Declaration for the next fifty years.

In addition, the European Union still faces a number of key health challenges that require coherent and consistent approaches across a range of policy areas. Non communicable conditions such as cancer and cardiovascular disease cause the greatest number of deaths in Europe, much of it preventable through healthier public policy, lifestyle changes, optimum nutrition and physical exercise. Significant disease burdens are also linked to environmental problems and social inequalities. Life expectancies can vary enormously between Member States and within Member States and this is unacceptable and unfair. There can be up to 15 years difference between life expectancy for those in the lower socio-economic group compared to those in the highest, and this must be addressed. Social and health objectives should therefore be considered as fundamental prerequisites for continued and sustainable economic development for generations to come.

European citizens want to see their health secured. The Eurobarometer for 2006 saw respect for human life and human rights in the top three priorities of European citizens. It is not only important to address the issues that are of most concern to the citizens of Europe, but to ensure that civil society continues to support healthier European policies, by strengthening their capacity to do so. Without civil society and without health as a clear priority, the EU risks distancing itself from its people.

The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) therefore calls on Heads of State and of Government of EU Member States to address the promotion of good health and prevention of ill health in their vision of the EU for the next 50 years.