



*Brussels, 15 April 2016*

## **OPEN LETTER TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INFORMAL HEALTH COUNCIL**

### **A CALL FOR CONCRETE ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE ACCESS TO MEDICINES**

Dear Health Ministers of the European Union,

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April you will meet for an informal health council meeting in Amsterdam. The European organisations active in the field of health and healthcare co-signing this letter recognize the importance of the discussion during this meeting about the market for pharmaceuticals and call for concrete action to ensure sustainable access to safe and good quality medicines.

The Dutch Minister of Health rightly mentioned it in her letter to the Dutch Parliament<sup>1</sup>: although pricing and reimbursement of pharmaceuticals is a national competence, there are many reasons to investigate where further EU collaboration can be useful for each independent member state. This is the right moment for political action.

The pharmaceutical scene is undergoing a period of rapid change, also thanks to new technologies. New drugs are offering new prospects for many people with serious diseases. At the same time, the costs of these new drugs are often extremely high, in some cases 500,000 euros per patient for one year.

The organisations co-signing this letter agree with the Dutch Minister of Health that at European level we have to intensify the discussion around safe and timely access to new drugs and around the pricing and reimbursement of drugs, including those drugs that have been developed for small groups of patients.

National health systems on their own have limited leverage to influence the behaviour of pharmaceutical companies or the prices of their products. We need a discussion on an EU level on how to tackle this problem. The Council should consider asking the Commission to investigate whether and how the lack of transparency of drug prices impacts affordable access to pharmaceuticals and how greater transparency will support local price and reimbursement decisions. The Dutch Minister of Health rightly points out that instruments developed (also at the EU level) to foster innovation are sometimes actually used by the industry to just maximize profit from a product, as in the case of certain orphan drugs. The Council should ask the Commission to investigate how these instruments can be adjusted so that they deliver what they were meant to and support local evaluation of benefit/harm and payment decisions. The Council should start a discussion on how to deal with prices in innovative fields such as biological drugs, where currently the relationship between the cost of innovation and a reasonable price is absent.

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<sup>1</sup> Medicines Policy Plan: New drugs available to patients fast at an acceptable cost.  
<https://www.government.nl/documents/letters/2016/03/07/medicines-policy-plan-new-drugs-available-to-patients-fast-at-an-acceptable-cost>

EU Member States can together take a stand to bring about the appropriate changes in market authorisation and supplementary market protection in addition to patent law; and even though this is a strictly national competence, also voluntary cooperation in the field of pricing and reimbursement.

By agreeing on concrete next steps for collaboration in this field, you, as Health Ministers, can ensure access to affordable medicines, an attractive drugs market and the right care for all patients for the long term. We count on you.

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#### **Association Internationale de la Mutualité (AIM)**

AIM is an international umbrella organisation of not-for-profit healthcare payers in Europe and in the world which operate on the basis of solidarity. Currently, AIM's membership consists of 62 member organisation (including many national umbrella organisations) in 30 countries. In Europe alone they provide coverage of healthcare to around 200 million people and many more in Africa and Latin America. AIM strives to contribute to the preservation and improvement of access to health care for everyone.

#### **European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)**

EPHA is a change agent – Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), and the EU Civil Society Contact Group

#### **European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)**

The European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP) represents over 40 national statutory social insurance organisations (covering approximately 240 million citizens) in 15 EU Member States and Switzerland, active in the field of health insurance, pensions, occupational disease and accident insurance, disability and rehabilitation, family benefits and unemployment insurance. The aims of ESIP and its members are to preserve high profile social security for Europe, to reinforce solidarity-based social insurance systems and to maintain European social protection quality. ESIP builds strategic alliances for developing common positions to influence the European debate and is a consultation forum for the European institutions and other multinational bodies active in the field of social security.

