



## **Recommendations on the new EU Health Strategy**

*Discussed and approved at the HEAL/WECEF workshop "Stopping Children's Chemicals Contamination", EPHA International Conference  
– Health in Enlarged European Union  
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### **I. Introduction**

We, the participants of the *HEAL/WECEF workshop "Stopping Children's Chemicals Contamination" EPHA Conference – Health in Enlarged European Union* assembled in Bratislava on 16 April 2007, are seriously concerned about the potentially devastating and possibly irreversible effects of multiple environmental factors on children's and human health.

The continuously increasing pollution by, amongst others, hazardous chemicals without sufficient knowledge of their cumulative and long-term health impacts is seen as a serious emerging health threat, not only within the European Union but also around the world.

There is a growing body of scientific evidence that demonstrates that a wide array of children's and human health problems can be caused or aggravated by environmental pollution and exposures. This is why environmental health should be prioritized as a "core issue" within the new EU Health Strategy and environmental protection should also be prioritized under the 'health in all policies' theme. The EU Health Strategy should explicitly acknowledge the link between declining environmental conditions such as pollution and ill health, and therefore the importance of better environmental condition and improved human health.

We welcome the efforts and activities of the European Commission to prepare a comprehensive EU Health Strategy but we would like to urge the EU to take prompt and effective actions within the framework of the EU Health Strategy to achieve significant reductions in hazardous chemical exposures to children, humans and the environment.

### **II. Key demands for the new EU Health Strategy**

We have 10 key areas of demands and recommendations where we would like to see action in the new EU Health Strategy:

- **Improvement of environmental conditions as a priority for health in other policies**
  - Promote and require substitutions of hazardous chemicals to achieve cleaner products, material processes and practices, including clean production, green chemistry and organic farming, that avoid generation and release of toxic (by)products, giving priority to healthier alternatives;
  - Promote the use of best available techniques and best available practices in all areas of human activities with the goal to reduce or eliminate harmful environmental pollution and human exposures.
  
- **Special protection of vulnerable groups**
  - Develop a protective Community environmental policy, particularly in relation to the vulnerable groups such as **children, fetuses, pregnant women and women of child bearing age**. This policy should be focused on the reduction of vulnerable groups' exposures to chemicals, radiation and other potential environmental causes of ill-health, prioritizing persistent and bioaccumulating substances, especially pesticides and other toxic chemicals to which vulnerable groups are exposed in food, soil, air, water, and consumer products, utilizing the precautionary principle whenever risks are likely to be serious and irreversible.

- **Precautionary principle**

A European Environment Agency publication (Late lessons from early warnings: the precautionary principle 1896-2000) defines precautionary principle as a general rule of public policy action to be used in situations of potentially serious or irreversible threats to health or the environment, where there is a need to act to reduce potential hazards before there is strong proof of harm, taking into account the likely costs and benefits of action and inaction.

Regarding environmental impacts on health, the scientific evidence is growing and increasingly alarming, especially concerning the impact on children. In conjunction with the EU treaty (Article 152) requiring that a high level of health protection be ensured in the definition and implementation of all community policies, we demand that the EU Health Strategy apply the precautionary principle. Take action when there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, even when missing full scientific certainty.

- **A comprehensive communication strategy and information system**

- Contribute to the development of an integrated environment and health information system and make accessible to the policy makers, professional and citizens. Particular attention should be paid to making the information understandable to average citizens (e.g. avoiding jargon)

- **Biomonitoring programme**

- Contribute public health expertise to the development of the EU wide biomonitoring programme which incorporates and evaluates the outcomes of existing biomonitoring programmes; uses Health Examination Surveys; and feeds into appropriate EU environmental policy regimes such as REACH to better protect human health and reduce disease;
- Ensure the biomonitoring programme in development focuses on vulnerable groups such as children, fetuses, pregnant women, women of the childbearing age and socio or economically disadvantaged groups to reduce health inequalities.

- **Research**

- Set research priorities and promote research projects to protect humans primarily vulnerable groups such as children and pregnant women, particularly by identifying and stimulating research regarding low dose chemical exposure, the timing and duration of exposures, exposures from multiple sources (e.g. food, air, water) and combined effects of multiple exposures (i.e. the cocktail-effect);
- Stimulate research on the relationship between environmental contamination and children's health and advocate policy to minimize childhood exposure to environmental contaminants;
- Build an international platform for multi-disciplinary expertise and a forum to present and discuss the latest research findings about the health and environment;
- Facilitate contacts between individual researchers and organizations by using electronic networking; in order to have better linkages between exposure and health data via different stakeholders in the field of human environmental health;
- Involve patients groups for diseases of increasing prevalence where environmental factors play a role;
- Integrate environmental health science into the curriculum of medical students and epidemiologists and into in- service training of medical professionals, for better diagnosis registration and treatment of environmental health problems.

- **Evaluation of, implementation of and co-operation with existing legislation and policies**

DG Sanco should work closely with other EU DGs e.g. DG Environment, DG Enterprise to provide information on health impacts of other sectoral policies in the context of the EU's Health Strategy's commitment to 'Health in all Policies'.

- Strong REACH implementation;
- Evaluation of, implementation of and co-operation with other EU strategies and/or policies e.g. Environment and Health Action Plan, Sustainable Development Strategy, the Lisbon Strategy, Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE), Community Strategy on Mercury;
- Evaluation of, implementation of and co-operation with other international strategies and/or policies e.g. Stockholm Convention (persistent organic pollutants), Basel Convention (waste issues); Rotterdam Convention

(international trade of hazardous chemicals), Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (a policy framework for international action on chemical hazards) to increase effective EU action on global health issues.

- **New policies and legislation**

- Develop a strategy for improving indoor air quality;
- Further improvement of food and feed legislation, including review of food labeling;
- Regulate the issue of GMOs according to the precautionary principle considering all possible effects on health and the environment.

- **Public awareness & public participation on environmental health issues**

- Develop a greater awareness among health professionals, health-affected groups and scientists with a focus on vulnerable groups as **children, fetuses, pregnant women and women of child bearing age**;
- Improve the education and awareness of parents, teachers and other guardians of children so that they can help create safer environments for them;
- Enhance public awareness regarding environmental hazards and human health with focus on vulnerable groups as children and pregnant women;
- Encourage public participation in the development of policies and programmes related to environment and health.

- **Right to know**

- Further improvement of the pollutant release and transfer register by improving how the information on environmental pollution is linked to adverse health effects;
- Access to toxicological information on pharmaceuticals.

Environmental and health protection both are major national and international policy goals.