

European charter for health equity

October 2011

european public health alliance





European Charter for Health Equity

Preamble

Whereas a country's progress cannot be measured or defined by economic growth on its own but by the fair distribution of health and well-being across all settings and regions, and within all population groups;

Whereas in contemporary societies people with higher socio-economic position lead healthier and longer lives as health of people is affected by the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work, age and make use (or not) of the systems put in place to deal with illness as concluded by WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health;¹

Whereas the evidence clearly indicates that the quality and distribution of these key determinants of health² are imbalanced and strongly linked to political, economic environmental and social structures across Europe and threatening the health of the most vulnerable population groups and people in vulnerable settings such as of hospitals, care houses and prisons;

Whereas between different Member States of the European Union there is already a 5-fold difference in deaths of infants under one year of age, a 14-year gap in life expectancy at birth for males and an 8-year gap for females, and these gaps are widening;

Whereas vulnerable and socially excluded groups in our societies such as some migrant or ethnic minorities have up to 10 years' shorter life expectancies than the general population they live in;

Whereas both the biological concept of sex and the social construct of gender matter in health at all levels and impact differently on women and men's health, access to health and healthcare creating gender gaps in health status, health-related behaviour, access to prevention and treatment in such a way that life expectancy in all Member States of the European Union is shorter for men than women, and that women experience poorer quality of life during their life course;

Whereas there are important gender gaps in health policies, research and services, and in many cases women are more and differently affected by disadvantages, inequality and poverty;

¹ WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health Report: Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2008.

² Key determinants of health: physical environments, social environments, income and social status, child development, education and literacy, employment and working conditions, life skills, health systems, genetics, gender and culture.



Whereas both the European Commission³ and the European Council⁴ expressed concerns about such dramatic differences in health and life expectancy between and within European countries and regions;

Whereas European societies value the concept of ‘equal opportunity’ and consider health inequalities as a loss of human productive and creative potential, and therefore have enshrined these values in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights⁵ and the Lisbon Treaty;^{6 7}

Whereas already existing legal and policy documents state that addressing all social determinants of health and reducing health inequalities is a matter of fairness and social justice as it improves the health of those most exposed to health threatening conditions and already experiencing health inequalities – the poor, the marginalised, and those excluded from participation in various aspects of society by virtue of their living conditions or legal status;^{8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16}

Whereas a debate on reducing health inequalities requires a multi-sectoral approach with active participation from civil society, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and including non-health actors;

Whereas it has become clear that one of the strengths of the civil society organisations, is their diversity which enables them to represent the many different voices of society and even those frequently excluded from it;

We, the undersigned, express our concern that existing systematic differences in health – widespread, unfair and avoidable – impose a growing threat to all people living in Europe and have to be addressed in a concerted manner at all levels and by all relevant stakeholders. Putting right these inequities is a matter of social justice.

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Solidarity in Health: Reducing health inequalities in the EU. COM(2009) 567 final.

⁴ Council Conclusions on Equity and Health in All Policies: Solidarity in health. 8 June 2010.

⁵ The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and in particular art. 35 stating that “everyone has the right of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices.”

⁶ Under art. 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, “Union action is to complement national policies and be directed towards improving public health; it is also to encourage cooperation between the Member States in the field of public health and, if necessary, to lend support to their action.”

⁷ Under art. 9 of the Treaty, “Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health.”

⁸ Council Conclusions on Health in All Policies. 16167/06

⁹ Council Conclusions on Common Values and Principles in EU Health Systems. 10173/06

¹⁰ Council Resolution on Action on Health Determinants. 29 June 2000.

¹¹ WHA Resolution on Reducing health inequalities through action on the social determinants of health. WHA62.14.

¹² WHA Resolution on monitoring of the achievements of the health-related Millennium Development Goals. WHA61.18

¹³ Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. COM(2005) 706.

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions on Telemedicine for the benefit of patients, healthcare systems and society. COM(2008) 689.

¹⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Patients safety, including the prevention and control of healthcare-associated infections. COM(2008) 836.

¹⁶ Council of the EU on Sustainable Development Strategy. 10117/06.



Article 1

The European Charter for Health Equity **reaffirms** the commitment to the values of wellbeing, solidarity, social justice, promotion of fundamental human rights and gender equity.

Furthermore, it reaffirms the commitment to the principle enunciated in the constitution of the WHO that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.

Article 2

The **purpose** of the Charter is to call for action from the civil society to all relevant stakeholders and in particular decision makers, relevant governmental and civil society partner organisations, and other regulatory bodies, to protecting and promoting people's health by acting on health inequalities between and within countries in Europe.

Article 3

This Charter has twin objectives: to increase awareness and motivate actions that will contribute to the improvement for health and well-being for all, and to reduce unfair and avoidable health inequalities. The achievement of these objectives requires a life course and gender perspective. Action to reduce health inequalities must start before birth and be followed and fostered through the further life of every child, adolescent, adult and elderly.

Signatories of the Charter fully support the conclusions of the Marmot Review¹⁷ and call on actions to implement its priorities:

- **Early Child Development as the best start in life** – as virtually every aspect of human development is laid as early as during the pregnancy and in early childhood, this period has lifelong impact on many aspects of health and well-being continuing to adolescence and adulthood. Poor health of children being born and growing up in poverty is unacceptable, and we must act.
- **All our children, young people and adults to make the most of their potential and control their lives** – investment in early child development is crucial, but maintaining any early equality gains requires a sustained commitment to all children and adolescents through the years of education. Poverty during adolescence worsens opportunities for later good living standards, behaviours, employment and income.

¹⁷ Fair Society. Healthy Lives. Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010. The Marmot Review Team, February 2010.



- **Fair and full employment and good working conditions for all** – enjoying good employment is of protective nature for health. People enter the job market smoother and better equipped with relevant skills when solid physical and mental health foundations were laid in childhood and adolescence. Already at the start, impoverished health and lost opportunities usually put people in disadvantaged position. Unemployment poses threats to health and therefore increases health inequalities. Insecure, inflexible and poor quality employment deteriorates employees' physical and mental health.
- **A healthy standard of daily living for all** – health inequalities arise as opportunities for a healthy life are missed due to insufficient means to do so. Inadequate nutrition, physical activity, housing, social interactions, transport, medical care and hygiene due to poverty are all powerful enough to impose persistent and inherent health inequalities that pass on from generation to generation. It is unfair, avoidable and we must break this circle.
- **Our health rooted in healthy, cohesive and sustainable places and communities** - physical and social aspect of communities, enabling and promoting healthy behaviours, and sense of common ownership over community health, all make a contribution to social dimension of health. Communities equipped in open and green spaces, public transport, quality housing and energy use as well as healthy food supply sources benefit with regards to health and social perspectives. There is a potential in each community to create and sustain health of its people.
- **Our communities need cost-effective ill-health prevention balanced with disease-treatment** - not only is the availability of curative health care system, its accessibility, quality and affordability (through health coverage especially for the most vulnerable groups) important for reducing health inequalities, gender biases and discrimination. Prevention in the context of the social determinants of health requires active and conscious involvement of a range of stakeholders – not necessarily from a health sector solely. By this means, ill-health prevention is vital to a lively and healthy community.

Commitment to act

We, the undersigned, commit ourselves to using this Charter as a basis to transform our shared values into action with an objective to catalyse implementation of the above commitments on health equity. We have a responsibility and have a role to enhance the ability of all stakeholders to improve health equity. Therefore, we commit ourselves to:

- **Promote** the shared values of solidarity, equity, gender equality, sustainability and participation through mainstreaming health equity in our policies and other actions to ensure due attention is paid to the needs of the poor and other vulnerable groups and to support a societal development that maximises individual and community potential;



- **Invest** in actions that promote and support health equity, social, gender and environmental determinants of health, and guarantee that such pro-health initiatives are coherent and integrated with effective and measurable evidence-based interventions that are responsive to people's needs, preferences and expectations;
- **Foster** and build capacity and cross-country learning and cooperation between all relevant stakeholders in development and implementation of policies that have positive impact on social determinants of health.

Health equity: call for action

We, signatories of the Charter, call on public decision makers to:

- increase expenditure allocated to the early years, skills development and family support across the social gradient;
- invest in healthy and sustainable communities and places which fully integrate the planning, transport, housing environment and health systems;
- ensure standard of living that enables and fosters health and well-being across the life course;
- ensure adequate social protection systems as a basic right for all persons living in Europe to protect the most vulnerable groups in society from falling into poverty,
- social exclusion and homelessness in the first place as well as a consequence of disease, disability or injury;
- ensure health coverage and access to healthcare for all, with a special attention for the most vulnerable groups;
- promote labour market participation and social cohesion;
- develop and implement standards for minimum income for healthy living;
- develop greater quality employment across the social gradient;
- prioritise investment in ill-health/injury prevention and health promotion across all sectors and with active and meaningful participation of all stakeholders;
- set up systematic monitoring schemes and performance assessments to ensure the implementation of policies supporting integrated care:
- work collaboratively across sectors to achieve a health in all policies approach to decision making:



- adopt, implement and enforce evidence-based measures targeted to poorer individuals, families and communities.

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Undersigned (updated September 2012):

Members of the European Parliament

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Marisa Matias MEP (GUE/NGL, Portugal)

Jean Lambert MEP (Greens, UK)

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Jo Leinen MEP (S&D, Germany)

Glenis Willmott MEP (S&D, UK)

European Economic and Social Committee

Staffan Nilsson, President

International and European Networks

Sir Michael Marmot President BMA, Chair
of the WHO Committee on Social
Determinants of Health

AGE-Platform Europe

European Patients Forum (EPF)

Association of Women of Southern Europe
(AFEM)

European Pharmaceutical Students'
Association (EPSA)

Autism-Europe

European Public Health and Agriculture
Consortium (EPHAC)

Confederation of Family Organisations in
the EU (COFACE)

European Respiratory Society (ERS)

Eurochild

European Roma Information Office (ERIO)

European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG)

European Shiatsu Federation

European League Against Rheumatism
(EULAR) Brussels Office

European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)

European Alcohol Policy Alliance
(Eurocare)

European Society for Neuropsychiatry

European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)

European Women's Lobby

European Federation of Associations of
Dieticians (EFAD)

European Youth Forum

European Association for Injury Prevention
and Safety Promotion (Eurosaf)

Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)



European Association for Senior Hospital Physicians (AEMH)	Green 10
European Cancer Leagues (ECL)	Handicap International
European Central Council of Homeopaths (ECCH)	Health Action International Europe (HAI Europe)
European Child Safety Alliance European Network Regions Improving Citizens' Health (ENRICH)	Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)
European Childhood Obesity Group (ECOG)	Health Care Without Harm
European Chiropractors' Union	ILGA-Europe
European Critical Care Foundation	International Diabetes Federation Europe
European Federation for Complementary and Alternative Medicines (EFCAM)	International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus
European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)	International Federation of Anthroposophic Doctors Associations (IVAA)
European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN)	International Planned Parenthood Federation – European Network (IPPF-EN)
European Federation of Patients' Associations for Anthroposophic Medicine (EFPAM)	Médecins du Monde/Doctors of the World International Network
European Forum for Primary Care	Mental Health Europe (MHE)
European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI)	Older Women's Network Europe (OWN Europe)
European Haematology Association	Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU)
European Healthcare Fraud and Corruption Network (EHFCN)	Santé Mentale et Exclusion Sociale (SMES-Europa)
European Heart Network (EHN)	Smoke Free Partnership
European Institute of Women's Health (EIWH)	Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)
European Men's Health Forum (EMHF)	Thalassaemia International Federation
European Network for Smoking Prevention (ENSP)	World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts - Europe Region (Europe Region WAGGGS)
European Parkinson's Disease Association (EPDA)	



National, regional and local organisations

Albania

Albanian Institute of Public Health

Austria

Austrian Diabetes Association

Paracelsus Private Medical School,

Austrian Obesity Association

Belgium

Médecins du Monde/ Dokters van de Wereld

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Bulgaria

Medical Faculty of Trakia University

Croatia

ABA Informatika

Croatian Association for Sanitary Engineering

Agency for Medicinal Products and Medical Devices

Croatian Laryngological Society

Alzheimer Disease Society

Croatian National Public Health Institute

Andrija Stampar Institute of Public Health,

Croatian Youth Network

Autonomous Trade Union of Service Sector of Croatia

Korana – Association for Consumer Protection of the Karlovac County

Centre for Promotion of European Standards in Healthcare, Civil Association Overweight Prevention

NGO Z.O.Z. Zaprešić, Croatia

PET+

Coalition of Associations in Healthcare,

PLIVA

Croatian Coeliac Coalition

Cyprus

Cyprus Alliance for Rare Disorders

Cyprus Diabetic Association

Cyprus Day Care Centre

Pancyprian Federation for the Welfare of the Elderly

Estonia

NGO Salutare

Finland

University of Helsinki

University of Tampere

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

HEPA Macedonia National Organisation for

University MIT Skopje



the Promotion of Health

France

Association Nationale de Prévention en
Alcoologie et Addictologie

Instance Regionale d'Education et de
Promotion de la Santé (IREPS)

Faculty of Medicines, University of
Montpellier

Médecins du Monde

Germany

Ärzte der Welt / Doctors of the World

Georgia

The GENESIS Association

University of Georgia

Greece

Οι Γιατροί του Κόσμου – Giatri tou
Kosmou / Doctors of the World

Israel

CHEN Patient Fertility Association

Ireland

Citizens Information Board

The Children's University Hospital

Italy

Autonomous Province of Bolzano/South
Tyrol

Equity in Health Institute

Centre for Paediatric Nutrition of the
"Sapienza" University in Rome

Malta

ADHD Family Support Group

National Association of Pensioners

The Netherlands

Dokters van de Wereld / Doctors of the
World

WEMOS

PHAROS

Poland

Green Institute (Zielony Instytut), Poland

Polish Society for Health Programmes

Portugal

Administração Regional de Saúde de
Lisboa e Vale do Tejo

Associação Protectora dos Diabéticos
de Portugal

Administração Regional de Saúde do

Médicos do Mundo / Doctors of the



Algarve	World
Romania	
Centre for Democratic Development	Romanian Federation of Diabetes, Nutrition and Metabolic Diseases
Romanian Association for Public Health and Health Management	Stichting Romanian Children's Humanitarian Foundation
Serbia	
Diabetes Association of Serbia	
Slovakia	
Fórum pre pomoc starším - Forum for Help to the Elderly	Slovak Public Health Association
Trnava University	
Slovenia	
Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations	Society for Individuals Suffering from Depression and Anxiety Disorders
CLAB	Society for Promotion of Equality and Plurality Vita Activia
DEBRA	Society for the Fight against Cancers Maribor
Drustvo za Avtizem DAN Maribor (Society against Autism DAN Maribor)	Slovenian Coalition for Tobacco Control and Public Health
Institute for Digital Participation	Umanotera, Slovenia
Invalidsko Drustvo Ilco za Korosko (Disability Association ILCO of Carinthia)	UP Društvo za pomoč zasvojenecem in njihovim svojcem (Association for Help to Addicted and their Families)
Nastja Klevze	Young People and Tobacco
SENT (Slovenian Society for Mental Health)	
Spain	
Médicos del Mundo / Doctors of the World	University of Alicante, Spain
Sweden	
Gemensam Välfärd	
Läkare i världen / Doctors of the World	Socialdemokraterna (Social Democratic Party)
S-Föreningen Bättre Och Jämlik Hälsa (Union for Better and Equal Health)	
Switzerland	
DocSWISS	Médecins du Monde



Turkey

Centre for Research and Promotion of
Community Health

United Kingdom

Cancer Research UK

Royal College of Physicians

Doctors of the World

StratAdviser

North West House Brussels Office

The Health and Europe Centre

Uzbekistan

Endocrinological and Diabetological Association of Uzbekistan





About 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), the EU Civil Society Contact Group and the Better Regulation Watchdog.

EPHA's Transparency register number is 18941013532-08.



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