



Brussels, 4 December 2019

Zero pollution and health protection at the core of the European Green Deal

Dear President of the European Commission,
Dear Executive Vice-President,
Dear European Commissioners,

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) would like to congratulate you on taking office. Our alliance is a leading European not-for-profit organisation bringing together over 80 member organisations across the European region, working for better health through a healthier environment.

We were encouraged to see health protection from environment and climate threats has been included in the political guidelines and in the hearings at the European Parliament, including a zero-pollution strategy with a commitment to align EU air quality legislation to World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, a ban on endocrine disrupting chemicals in toys, cosmetics and food contact materials and the move towards healthy energy and greater climate mitigation ambition¹.

At the start of the Commission's 2019-2024 term, HEAL calls on you to translate the support expressed for environmental health protection into tangible and impactful policy proposals and legislation. **We consider that zero pollution and health protection need to be at the core of the Commission's flagship European Green Deal. It is essential that the European Green Deal delivers on climate change, on clean air and on health protection from hazardous chemicals, including endocrine disrupting chemicals.**

Regarding climate change, there is no doubt that it is the greatest threat to public health of the 21st century. The landmark Lancet Countdown², which tracks over 40 indicators across climate change and health, has recently found that "the life of every child born today will be profoundly affected by climate change" and that "without accelerated intervention, this new era will come to define the health of people at every stage of their lives". At the same time, if decisive action was taken now to limit global temperatures to well below 2 degrees Celsius, children would live healthier throughout their lives. The Lancet Countdown underlines that "placing health at the centre of the coming transition will yield enormous dividends for the public and the economy, with cleaner air, safer cities, and healthier diets".

¹ <https://www.env-health.org/heal-welcomes-the-10-commitments-from-frans-timmermans-virginijus-sinkevicius-and-stella-kyriakides-to-act-for-a-healthy-planet-for-healthy-people/>

² Lancet Countdown 2019 report: <http://www.lancetcountdown.org/2019-report/>

In order to protect health today and in the future, HEAL urges you to up the EU's climate mitigation goal for 2030 to at least 65% emissions reductions, and set the path to achieving climate neutrality by 2040.

Regarding clean air, EU air quality standards are still exceeded across the bloc, despite a comprehensive EU framework in place. In addition, for key pollutants the standards are less strict than WHO's health-based recommendations. Air pollution is one of the top risk factors for chronic disease including heart disease, asthma, cancer; recent science also links it to diabetes, obesity and mental health. Placing zero pollution at the heart of the European Green Deal is essential to lessen the huge and increasing health cost from these chronic diseases. There are significant synergies to be reaped from linking climate and clean air efforts, given that fossil fuel combustion drives both CO2 emissions and air pollution.

In order to protect health today and in the future, HEAL³ urges you to act on exceedances of air standards from day one in office, and to propose an ambitious zero pollution strategy to pave the way for the alignment of EU air standards with WHO and the latest science, as well as further cutting pollution at the source.

Regarding hazardous chemicals, chemical production and use are going up across Europe and globally, while the body of evidence on the health toll of hazardous chemicals keeps growing. A commitment to zero pollution means taking decisive action to lessen chemicals exposure and prevent health harm⁴, particularly to eliminate exposure in the most critical phases of development such as during pregnancy. Identification of hazardous chemicals under the EU's landmark REACH regulation is woefully slow, and endocrine disruptors can still be found in consumer products including toys, cosmetics and food contact materials.

In order to protect health today and in the future, a non-toxic environment⁵ and an EDC strategy need to be at the core of the European Green Deal, and a move to 100% non-toxic material cycles is necessary by 2030.

The growing citizens' movement across Europe and the mounting evidence on the health repercussions of the climate and environment crises make clear that business as usual is no longer an option. We welcome that the Commission has recognized the need for transformative action through the instrument of a European Green Deal.

We call on you to put forward a proposal that will truly put Europe's economy on the path for climate, environment and health promotion and protection. HEAL and our member organisations are ready to work with you on this change, and to provide more details on the points outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,

Génon K. Jensen
Executive Director of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

³ More information on HEAL's demands for clean air in the European region: <https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Infographic-eight-demands.pdf>

⁴ More information on HEAL's demands for chemicals reforms <https://www.env-health.org/a-chemicals-strategy-as-part-of-the-european-green-deal-time-to-deliver/>

⁵ More information on HEAL's recommendations on how the EU can lead the way towards a non-toxic environment: <https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/HEALs-vision-for-a-non-toxic-environment-strategy-EN.pdf>

On behalf of:

