



**European Public Health Alliance – May 2008**

**Position of the European Public Health Alliance to the open consultation on priorities and progressive policies for the manifesto by the Party of the European Socialists.**



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### **The European Public Health Alliance at a glance.**

EPHA is a **unique** organisation; through its experience, contacts and connections it informs on the constantly evolving political environment of public health in Europe.

Through its policy and actions, EPHA anticipates change and issues crucial to health.

Above all, through an alert and flexible stance EPHA makes an effective contribution to all debates touching on the issue of public health and it can ensure that its members' views are put to decision makers at appropriate points in the process.

EPHA is both a **public health platform** and a **public health network**.

**EPHA** seeks to express the following **core values** throughout its actions and communication with members, policy makers, institutions and more widely across Europe.

- **Health as a basic human right:**

EPHA supports Article 12 of the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its recognition of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

- **Equity, solidarity and accessibility of health and healthcare:**

EPHA stresses the need to reduce inequalities in health and to ensure availability (functioning public health and healthcare facilities, sufficient quantity), accessibility (no exceptions; physical, economic, information, non discrimination); acceptability (culturally appropriate and medically ethical, improve health; quality (medically and scientifically appropriate and of good quality).

- **Independent public health policy:**

EPHA promotes the development of public health policy independent from commercial or economic interests.

Public health is frequently concerned with conflicting values and it is not always possible to achieve a consensus. Whilst EPHA recognizes that partnerships are important, it also acknowledges the differing capacity of stakeholders to participate and witnesses the fact that many industry sectors deploy significant resources for lobbying and influencing EU policies to the priorities of corporate interests.

EPHA intends to remain a counterweight to commercial interests in order to provide a genuine voice for citizens' concerns.

## **EPHA welcomes the PES challenge for a new Social Europe.**

Current policies are failing, the evidence is clear because **inequalities** are growing each day. In the health Community unemployment and low income groups suffer more chronic diseases and have less life expectancy.

The biggest opportunity for change is the EU Business plan, 'The Lisbon Strategy'.

Economic growth and developments needs can only be incentivised by a clear change in policy is needed and should be addressing health inequalities Europe is facing today.

The approaches for a better policy could include:

- setting health inequality targets;
- integrating health determinants in other policy areas;
- involving people in community development approaches to health promotion;
- ensuring and improving access for all to healthcare;
- monitoring and evaluation of policy;
- health impact assessment of policy;
- dissemination of good practice and research.

Political acknowledgement, priority and target setting is necessary to change the current debate in Europe.

Reducing inequalities in health needs to be seen as an important objective for health and social policy. Without political commitment, no change is likely; with it, change is possible.

Politicians need to see this as a cross-sectoral issue in which environmental and economic policies are as important as health service or social policies whether in European, national or local policy making = health in all policies.

This understanding of the causes of ill health and health inequalities is not yet universally shared by Europe's politicians. Where it is understood, inequality may not yet be regarded as a priority for health or health service policy.

Where targets exist politicians can more readily be held accountable for the actions they are taking to address these inequalities.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have a clear and potentially powerful role in bringing about local and national partnerships to reduce health inequalities. For example, action is needed to improve housing conditions, increase incomes and secure welfare rights, and to improve working and social environments. NGOs are catalysts for this approach to health improvement - as lobbyists, activists, service providers and advocates.

Health services should be actively involved in addressing unequal provision, particularly with excluded groups.

Reducing inequalities in income is the biggest single means through which inequalities in health will be reduced. Given the weight of evidence that poverty and disadvantage are major causes of ill health, the reluctance to highlight economic inequality across the EU is disappointing. There is a need for improved housing, higher incomes for the less well off and better working conditions for all across all Member States. Early years family support and education as well as nutritional programmes appear to be promising interventions.

**European Democracy is a fundamental principle of the EU and the basis of all our societies.**

The European Union is increasingly perceived as distant from EU citizens and concerns are growing about how policy is made and in whose interest.

The European Parliament has an important democratic role to play and should continue its work to ensure the quality delivered by policy makers, particularly elected representatives to hold the EU Institutions to account by ensuring they act in the public interest.

**In Save Our Planet, Europe needs to consider its leadership position globally in tackling climate change.**

The next European Parliament will see huge challenges, emergency challenges in climate change, energy and food prices.

The European Parliament needs to be bold and decisive on a micro and macro level in particular in tackling Europe's **Industrial and Agricultural policy** which is the security of our planet and addressing the major public health aspects of both policies.