

PUT HEALTH FIRST

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

On 3 April 2008, the European Commission Vice-President, Mr. Günter Verheugen will address the ENVI Committee on the crucial issue of information on medicinal products.

Four years ago the European Parliament asked the European Commission to “present a report on current practice with regard to information provision - particularly on the internet – and its risks and benefits for patients” following consultation with the stakeholders. Following the analysis of the data, the Commission was asked, if appropriate, to “ put forward proposals setting out an information strategy to ensure good-quality, objective, reliable and non promotional information on medicinal products and other treatments and address the question of the information source liability”(art. 88a Directive 2001/83/EC).

In our view, up till now, the European Commission failed to meet these obligations as:

- The report published in December 2007 is partial and incomplete and disregards the opinions expressed by different stakeholders during the consultation.
- The preliminary proposal outlined in the consultation published in February 2008
 - **doesn't set out an information strategy** but just provide the pharmaceutical industries greater flexibility to provide information directly to the public on prescription medicines;
 - is based on an **unworkable distinction between information and advertizing**;
 - it will allow the industry to choose on which particular disease or specific medicine the “information” will be provided and how much money to spend on it;
 - it will **give rise to detrimental consequences**, including a push towards high margin and expensive medicines with a logical increase both on costs and health care budget expenditure, a bias against non-drug therapies and a pressure on the doctor/patient relationship.
- It **focuses exclusively on the industry** whose commercial interests are in conflict with the consumer right to high quality, unbiased, comparative and non promotional information and doesn't explore any appropriate alternatives.

.../...

For these reasons we call you to ask the European Commission to reconsider its preliminary proposal and to proceed, in cooperation with the Member States, to the development of a comprehensive health information strategy that:

- **Puts health interests first;**
- Is based on a comprehensive assessment of consumers information needs, how these are currently being met, and where improvements are needed;
- Relies on and promotes good and independent sources of information;
- Enable consumers to choose and compare different medicines and treatments options;
- Truly addresses inequalities in the access of information by a broad public health perspective.

Thank you for taking consumers interests into account when discussing this sensitive topic.

For more information about BEUC position, please contact Ilaria Passarani (Health policy Officer) via e-mail, health@beuc.eu, or phone 0032.2.743.1593.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens
Director General