



Press release  
Brussels, 13 July 2010

## **Towards direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription drugs in Europe? *A critical moment***

In September, Members of European Parliament (MEPs) will decide on the highly controversial patient “information” proposals (a Directive and a Regulation) (vote in ENVI – the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee).

Since the start of this decade, pharmaceutical companies have been lobbying hard for the ban on direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription drugs to be lifted.

Despite the European Parliament’s overwhelming rejection (by 494 votes to 42) of the proposal to lift the ban on DTCA of prescription drugs in 2002, pharmaceutical companies, some press groups and the European Commission have continued to push for this ban to be overturned. In the face of stifling innovation, patients are now the target of marketers’ efforts to protect the volume of drug sales and foster future growth.

**The vote in the ENVI Committee in September 2010 gives MEPs the opportunity to transform the Commission’s proposals from a public health threat into real progress for patients.**

Evidence gathered in the USA shows that DTCA for prescription drugs is highly profitable for companies, and disastrous for public health and health budgets. Excessive promotion can lead to severe adverse drug reactions due to the overconsumption of drugs that consumers do not necessarily need, or should actively avoid because of a risk of drug interactions.

This is why the *Medicines in Europe Forum*, *Health Action International (HAI) Europe*, and the *International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB)* urge MEPs to **uphold the strict ban on advertising**. MEPs certainly must not allow pharmaceutical companies to publicly disseminate “information” derived from official information, which is selectively edited to highlight the benefits of the drugs and gloss over potential adverse drug reactions. Experience has shown how skilfully advertisers can exploit this sort of loophole.

*MiEF*, *HAI Europe* and *ISDB* urge also MEPs to vote for the amendments aimed at **enhancing access to non-promotional, independent and comparative information**. Efforts should first be focused on the information held by the European and national Drug Regulatory Agencies, whose lack of transparency is coming under increasing scrutiny, particularly by the European Ombudsman.

There is a lot at stake. Patients’ rights to reliable, independent and comparative information need to be guaranteed to enable them to make their own informed choices.

**Medicines in Europe Forum**

**HAI Europe**

**ISDB**

[Click here for a more detailed briefing paper](#)  
[\(with crucial amendments & bibliographical references: 3 pages\)](#)

**HAI Europe.** Health Action International (HAI) Europe is an independent European network of health, consumer and development organisations working to increase access to essential medicines and improve rational use. More info: [www.haiweb.org](http://www.haiweb.org). Contact: [teresa@haiweb.org](mailto:teresa@haiweb.org).

**ISDB.** International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB), founded in 1986, is a world wide Network of bulletins and journals on drugs and therapeutics that are financially and intellectually independent of pharmaceutical industry. Currently, ISDB has 79 members in 40 countries around the world. More info: [www.isdbweb.org](http://www.isdbweb.org). Contact: [president@isdbweb.org](mailto:president@isdbweb.org).

**MiEF.** Medicines in Europe Forum (MiEF), launched in March 2002, covers 12 European Member States. It includes more than 70 member organisations representing the four key players on the health field, i.e. patients groups, family and consumer bodies, social security systems, and health professionals. Such a grouping is unique in the history of the EU, and it certainly reflects the important stakes and expectations regarding European medicines policy. Admittedly, medicines are no simple consumer goods, and the Union represents an opportunity for European citizens when it comes to guarantees of efficacy, safety and pricing. Contact: [pierrechirac@aol.com](mailto:pierrechirac@aol.com).