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# HEALTH AND CONSUMER VOICE

## Free to choose treatment across the EU



Tonio Borg  
EU Commissioner for Health

After years of legal uncertainty, things have finally become clear for European patients who seek healthcare treatment in another Member State. Thanks to the Directive on Cross-Border Healthcare, they can choose

to receive healthcare from the provider of their choice in another EU country, and claim reimbursement up to the cost of that treatment in their home country. And that's not all. The new law introduces another two major changes for patients.

Firstly, the need to seek prior authorisations for reimbursement becomes the exception rather than the rule. This cuts red tape and speeds up patients' access to treatment.

Secondly, it introduces a minimum set of rights for all EU patients: a right to the information they need to make informed decisions; a right to transparency on quality and safety standards; a right to appeal and seek redress; a right to a copy of their medical records. The new National Contact Points which each Member State will establish will help citizens get the information they need.

In addition, the EU country Directive confirms that medical prescriptions can be dispensed across EU borders, and brings together Member States to promote the development of interoperable eHealth tools and greater co-operation on the assessment of health technologies.

Finally, the Directive provides for the creation of European reference networks, to encourage the pooling of knowledge, and access to highly specialized diagnosis and treatment, for example of rare diseases.

This new law marks a real breakthrough for patients. For patients to benefit from the rights granted by EU law, however, the law needs to be properly transposed and enforced. The ball is now in the court of the EU country, who must deliver on their obligations by transposing the Directive into national law.

### TOP TWEETS



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700 000 people die each year prematurely due to #tobacco related diseases in #EU [#ingograph bit.ly/VRmRbL](http://bit.ly/VRmRbL) #whywecare

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8:38 AM - 8 Oct 13



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## INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

### Outcome of Parliament's vote on Commission's new tobacco rules

A Commission proposal to improve the functioning of the internal market for tobacco and related products was voted on the European Parliament on 8 October.

MEPs voted in favour of health warnings covering the top 65% of tobacco packs and supported the proposed ban of products with characterizing flavours. They voted in favour of strong tracking and tracing system to combat illicit trade and strengthened provisions on cross-border trade. They rejected the proposed ban on slim cigarettes and voted against regulating e-cigarettes as medicines, unless they are presented as having curative or preventive properties.

The rapporteur, Ms McAvan (S&D) was granted a mandate to negotiate a first-reading agreement with EU ministers.

After the vote, Tonio Borg, EU Commissioner for Health strongly reaffirmed: "I am confident that the revised directive on tobacco products can still be adopted under the mandate of the current Parliament".

## Memorandum of Understanding

On 23 July 2013, Paola Testori Coggi, Director General for Health and Consumers (SANCO), European Commission and Dominique Ristori, Director General of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) signed a memorandum of understanding. The agreement promotes cooperation between SANCO and JRC in programming and implementing EU policies in public health, consumer policy and food and feed safety.

## Strengthening the safety of medical devices



Neven Mimica  
EU Commissioner for Consumer Policy

All medical devices, ranging from plasters to pace-makers, must be safe and serve the needs they were manufactured for. Some, for example, prosthetic heart valves, are classified as high risk medical devices. As such, they must undergo a specific round of checks prior to entering the market. Notified bodies – specific entities designated by Member States and notified to the European Commission, are in charge of carrying out these checks or conformity assessments as they are known.

In the wake of the PIP breast implant scandal in 2010, the EU took immediate steps to deal with short-comings that the crisis had revealed. These measures were set out in the Joint Plan for immediate action agreed between the Commission and the Member States following the scandal. The plan covers actions by the Commission, Member States and the notified bodies themselves. Most measures have now been implemented or are under implementation.

The last essential element of the plan to be fulfilled was the reinforcement of the controls on manufacturers by fully competent and empowered notified bodies. To this end, the European Commission adopted in September, two measures focusing among others on the functioning of notified bodies, the clarification on the level of knowledge and experience of their staff and the surveillance of these bodies by the Member States. Both measures aim to maximise the potential of existing legislation until tighter controls envisaged in the Commission's proposal for new legislation – currently negotiated in the European Parliament and Council – comes into place.

## Animal welfare in the EU

### Achievements and future prospects

Animal welfare has been firmly rooted in the European Commission's work for over 30 years. It took off in earnest when the Lisbon Treaty recognised animals as sentient beings. Since then, animal welfare has scored major victories regarding farm animals, the transport of animals and those used in labs.

The ban on battery cages for laying hens, in force since 2012, has improved the life of 320 million hens in several Member States. The requirement for group housing of sows during pregnancy has, for its part, benefited 12 million sows. The quality of animal transport has steadily increased with better

vehicles and more skilful handling of animals and in 2009, testing on animals for cosmetic purposes was banned. A lot has been achieved, but more remains to be done to ensure the welfare of all animals, including pets.

The European Commission organised, last October 28, a first European conference on the welfare of dogs and cats. Stakeholders from Europe debated the welfare of companion animals in breeding and trading practices. A study into the welfare of pets in commercial practices was also launched. Based on the outcome of the study and the conference, the Commission will consider how to further improve animal welfare.

## Long live Ex-Smokers!



On 26 September, events took place across Europe to mark the first ever Day of the Ex-Smoker, an initiative of the “Ex-Smokers are Unstoppable” campaign, and the first health awareness day to celebrate the achievements of ex-smokers.

Speaking at a public event, European Commissioner for Health, Tonio Borg said: *“Tobacco remains the greatest avoidable health risk of our time. The Day of the Ex-Smoker is an opportunity for us to acknowledge the willpower all ex-smokers have shown to eliminate smoking from their lives and embrace a smoke-free future. I congratulate them all.”*

Celebrities, such as world renowned DJ, Bob Sinclar, the European Lung Foundation and other health organisations joined in the celebrations. It is hoped that the messages passed on the Day of the Ex-Smoker will convince smokers that a life without tobacco is something worth striving for.

## European Antibiotic Awareness Day 2013

European Antibiotic Awareness Day takes place on 18 November to raise awareness about the threat of antibiotic resistance and the prudent antibiotic use.

Resistance to antimicrobials has taken on serious proportions in Europe. Every year, 25.000 patients die of infections caused by antimicrobial-resistant bacteria. This is all the more alarming because antimicrobials are vital for modern human and veterinary medicine. Besides, we are currently relying on the last remaining generation of these medications.

In 2011, the Parliament called on the Commission to urgently establish an all-encompassing action plan against antimicrobial resistance (AMR). A 5 year action plan was launched to be implemented with Member States. Based on a ‘one health’ approach, the plan promotes such actions as efficient communication campaigns on the appropriate use of antimicrobials,



research for new effective antimicrobials and improved monitoring in humans and animals.

This year’s ECDC stakeholder event ‘Everyone’s responsible’ (15 November 2013) will inform the press on most recent antimicrobial resistance and antibiotic consumption trends. The Commission will present the most recent initiatives to combat antimicrobial resistance in the EU and will announce the results of the Eurobarometer 2013 AMR on public attitudes toward antibiotics.

## IN BRIEF

### The black symbol ▼

Since 1 September, a black inverted triangle has started to appear on medicines monitored by regulatory authorities. With this measure, the Commission aims to improve the safety of medicines and to highlight to patients, the importance of reporting suspected side effects of the medicines they are taking.

### World Food Day

16 October marks World Food Day - an occasion to remember that 90 million tons of food is wasted annually in Europe. The Commission is examining how to better apply resources to the production and consumption of food. For more information read the EU roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe:

### Recent report on Health inequalities

Health inequalities have significantly dropped in the EU over the past years. However, there remain gaps in health equality between social groups and between regions and Member States. Read the full reports and find out more about EU action to address health inequalities:

### 4th Journalist Workshop on Organ Donation

The shortfall of organs available for transplant is a serious issue in Europe. Journalists play a valuable role in raising awareness of citizens so that they consider donation. The 4th Workshop on Organ Donation allowed us to brief journalists on significant progress made recently, e.g. on the Action Plan on Organ donation and transplantation or the transposition and implementation of the Directive on standards of quality and safety of human organs intended for transplantation.



## Behavioral Economics

### Bringing the human factor back into policy-making

On 30 September, the Commission held a high-level conference on behavioural sciences. At this occasion, we interviewed one of our speakers, Olivier Oullier, Professor at Aix-Marseille University.

### Professor, what are behavioural sciences and how can they improve policy-making?

They allow us to better understand and act on how people make decisions, such as buying services. Studies have shown that if you want people to use less electricity, financial incentives are not the best way to change their

behaviour. Informing them on what their neighbours are doing is way more effective.

### How can policy-makers and scientists cooperate on policy-making?

One may think that scientists and policy-makers have very different goals and timelines. This is wrong. Their work is complementary. Thanks to tools like social media we collect unprecedented data. We have to put it to good use to test new policies before implementing them. I have no doubt that recent Commission's initiatives in the field will enhance cooperation between scientists and policy-makers.



## Ask the Director General – Gastein Health Forum



*Paola Testori Coggi  
Director General  
for Health and Consumers*

### What was your 'take home message' from this year's European Health Forum on 'Resilient and Innovative Health Systems in Europe'?

Firstly, I noted a shift in the way Europe's health community is defining the current

challenges we face. Speakers talked not of a 'crisis', as in the past, but of a 'new reality' to which our health systems must adjust.

The connection with our recent report 'Investing in Health' could not have been clearer! I emphasized that investing in people's health and in sustainable health systems was the right way forward! European Commissioner for Health, Tonio Borg further acknowledged that these were hard times for Member States and he reiterated that Commission was there to help.

I was pleased that the Commission's messages went down well. Several participants said that when it comes to health, 'we need more Europe'. This was like music to my ears.

## COMING UP

### 25 November

Commissioner Mimica will greet the winners of the Consumer Classroom competition at the Berlaymont.

### 25 November

The EIP on Healthy Ageing conference will focus on the work undertaken in 2012 by the Partnership's action groups and the Reference sites.

### 1 December

A Commission Decision on neonicotinoids enters into force.



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