

HAI EUROPE RESPONSE

Amsterdam, 18 June 2009

Response to the EU Health Policy Forum consultation: 'Impact of the Economic Crisis on Health'

This response has been prepared by Health Action International (HAI) Europe. HAI Europe is a non-profit, European network of consumers, public interest NGOs, health care providers, academics, media and individuals with over 25 years experience in representing the voice of civil society, and poor and marginalised people in medicines policy debates.

Our authority rests on the integrity of our membership mandate, independence from commercial and political party interests, and our research excellence and evidence-based advocacy.

- HAI Europe promotes increased access to essential medicines, the essential medicines concept and the rational use of medicines.
- HAI advocates for greater transparency in all aspects of decision making around pharmaceuticals, for example, by reducing industry secrecy and control over important clinical data.
- HAI promotes the rational use of medicines; that all medicines marketed should meet real medical needs; have therapeutic advantages; be acceptably safe and offer value for money.
- HAI works for better controls on drug promotion and the provision of unbiased and independent information for prescribers and consumers.

Summary

HAI welcomes the opportunity to share our impressions of the real impact of the economic crisis on health experienced and witnessed by members of the HAI network. After consulting with HAI members, several alarming circumstances have surfaced.

Ireland - Human papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

In light of a Health Technology Assessment published in February 2008 by the Health Information and Quality Authority, the Irish Minister for Health gave approval for the inclusion of the HPV vaccination in the national immunisation schedule. However, months later in November 2008, she announced that due to the economic situation, resources were going to be concentrated on the National Cervical Screening Programme and the initiation of the HPV vaccination programme was to be deferred. Clearly, if national HPV immunisation was considered a public health priority at the beginning of the year, it should still be considered a priority after the advent of the financial crisis. The National Women's Council of Ireland is one of a number of civil society organisations that opposes this decision.

Ireland – Reimbursement of Medicines & Consultations

HAI Europe is shocked by the programme of withdrawing medical cards from older people, which marks a return to former policies in Ireland, of means testing. When announced in October 2008, it sparked unprecedented public protests by older people and angry confrontations between them and politicians.ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Orla O'Donovan from the University College Cork wrote one of many newspaper articles that appeared in opposition to the measure which has since been implemented.^{iv}

International Aid

The impact of the economic crisis has also generated discussion within the international development community regarding the allocation of funding for international aid and for aid and development organisations. We are already aware that the Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister has issued a strategic plan that involves the reduction of available funding and therefore, it would not be surprising if other European Union Member States followed.

We are most concerned that the global poor, burdened with poverty and a disproportionate weight of the international finicial crisis will be penalised again, because of the reduction in direct and indirect international aid from the European Union Member States. The finaicial crisis should not cloud the vision and financial obligation of developed countries to pursure global development programmes that directly impact on the lives of the majority world.

ENDNOTES

iv Irish Times. "Medical card fight is worth taking to the streets". Dr. Orla O'Donovan . October 23, 2008. http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2008/1023/1224713293075.html.





ⁱ Health Information and Quality Authority. *The Role of Human Papillomavirus Vaccines in Reducing the Risk of Cervical Cancer in Ireland: A Health Technology Assessment*. 25th February 2008. http://www.allirelandnci.org/pdf/HPV_HTA.pdf.

ii National Women's Council of Ireland. *Submission to Supplementary Budget*. April 2009. http://www.nwci.ie/publications/pre_budget_submissions/pre_budget_submission_2009.

iii Irish Times. "Up to 15,000 protest over medical cards". Genevieve Carbery. October 22, 2008. http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2008/1022/breaking3.htm.