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EuroHealthNet: “Help make reducing health inequalities a priority for the EU”!

EuroHealthNet welcomes today’s important step taken by the European Parliament for the European citizens, by the adoption of the report on “Reducing Health Inequalities in the EU”. For EuroHealthNet, the adoption of the report by the European Parliament is vital and marks a renewed commitment from the European Parliament to address health inequalities in the EU. Europe is at a critical juncture. As the European Union struggles to recover from the economic crisis, policy makers at all levels can ensure that pre-existing and now rapidly increasing social and health inequalities do not further compromise the health and well-being of EU citizens.

EuroHealthNet reiterates that the health of EU citizens is determined by the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances, which are shaped by policy choices, are mostly responsible for health inequalities – the unfair and avoidable differences in health status between and within countries. Health inequalities persist across the EU, within and between Member States, and there is evidence that they are widening. They result in:

- **Life expectancy gaps**: Life expectancy at birth between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups is 10 years for men and 6 years for women and differences also exist within countries;
- **Significant economic costs**: Health inequalities related losses have a significant impact on productivity. They have been estimated to cost around €141 billion annually;
- **Increased poverty and social exclusion**: Health, poverty and social exclusion are strongly interrelated: ill health can lead to social exclusion while the conditions of poverty and social exclusion often lead to ill health. These are often cyclical and, in many cases, are passed on across generations. Over 80 million people currently live in poverty in the EU.

Thus, the European Parliament gives a strong message to citizens by facing the important challenges related to health inequalities in the EU.

EuroHealthNet Director Clive Needle said *“When Parliament approved a first EU Public Health Action Programme in 1999 it agreed tackling inequalities should be a priority. Now MEPs are re-asserting that objective, by calling for specific approaches. It is needed now more than ever. Parliament can now hold the EC and states to account, as we will, for real actions on behalf of not just the most vulnerable people,*



but for the overwhelming majority of EU citizens who do not enjoy the same benefits of wellbeing as the fortunate few.

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EuroHealthNet is a not-for-profit network of regional and national agencies responsible and accountable for health promotion, public health and disease prevention in Europe. Its aim is to improve the health of European citizens by striving for a healthier Europe with greater health equity between and within countries. EuroHealthNet does that by supporting projects and policy development together with its members and the EU institutions; by exchanging information and by communication in and beyond its network.

More information available at:

www.eurohealthnet.eu

www.health-inequalities.eu

www.health-gradient.eu

www.equitychannel.net