

PRESS RELEASE

NGOS RESIGN FROM HEALTH FORUM AS COMMISSION IGNORES MEMBER STATE AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CALLS FOR ALCOHOL STRATEGY

Public Health NGOs have today resigned from the EU Alcohol and Health Forum, following the announcement by Commissioner Andriukaitis that he has no plans to establish a new EU Alcohol Strategy¹. The Commissioner's decision goes against demands from Member States and the European Parliament for a new comprehensive Strategy to tackle alcohol harm in Europe.

Membership of the Forum, which is chaired by DG Sante, includes drinks industry representatives and public health NGOs. More than 20 health bodies, including Eurocare (European Alcohol Policy Alliance), EPHA (European Public Health Alliance) and the CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors) today tendered their collective resignation in an open letter to Commissioner Andriukaitis.

Signatories to the letter outline their "deep concerns" about the neglect of public health and the prioritisation of alcohol industry interests. These include:

- The Commission is ignoring calls from the European Parliament and Member States to develop a new EU Alcohol Strategy
- The Commission plans to include alcohol within a wider framework for tackling chronic disease, which would fail to address many harms caused by alcohol to those other than the drinker, such as drink driving, domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation
- There is no evidence to show that the EU Alcohol and Health Forum has had any impact on public health
- The Forum was established to support the implementation of the previous EU Alcohol Strategy, which ended in 2012. With no new Strategy planned, membership of the Forum cannot be justified.

Signatories also expressed disappointment that the Commissioner had rejected requests for public health experts to have a formal structure to meet with Commission officials to discuss alcohol policy, free from vested interest groups.

Mariann Skar, Secretary General of Eurocare, said:

"The Commissioner himself stated drinking behaviours in Europe are good for the Alcohol Industry but not good for Health. Eurocare represents 58 organisations in 25 countries and we deeply regret the Commission's decision not to establish a new EU Alcohol Strategy. This flies in the face of persistent demands from Member States, the European Parliament and NGOs. The EU is the heaviest drinking region in the world and with 120,000 premature deaths related to alcohol each year, we absolutely must have a comprehensive strategy to tackle alcohol harm."

Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, Chair of the EU Alcohol and Health Forum's Science Group said,

"This is a sad day for those who care about health in Europe. The Commission's prioritisation of alcohol industry interests over public health has been laid bare. Many NGOs have participated actively and in good faith in the EU Alcohol and Health Forum, in the hope of making progress and reducing alcohol harm. However, with no evidence to indicate the Forum has achieved any

¹ The previous EU Alcohol Strategy expired in 2012, since when there have been many calls by member states, NGOs and industry representatives for its replacement.

meaningful results, and no promise of a new Alcohol Strategy, we see no alternative to walking away from this failing organization.”

Nina Renshaw, Secretary General of EPHA, said,

"The alcohol industry must have raised a few glasses to DG SANTE after their admission at the last Forum meeting that they don't even aim to improve health. The Commission has finally admitted what the health community has long suspected - that they have abandoned alcohol policy altogether. The Forum has proved worse than useless, a free PR front for the industry. The Commission even endorses the industry introducing drinking culture to young kids by promoting "responsible" drinking in primary schools. The health community had to call time on this charade."

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

A short briefing on the EU Alcohol and Health Forum and why health NGOs have resigned is attached to this press release.

Facts and figures about alcohol in Europe

- Alcohol is the 3rd top risk factor in Europe for ill health and NCDs such as cancer and cardiovascular disease
- Alcohol is a toxic substance in terms of its direct and indirect effects on a wide range of body organs and a cause of some 60 diseases. Taking all diseases and injuries at global level into account, the negative health impact of alcohol consumption is 31.6 times higher than benefit
- 12 million people in the EU are dependent on alcohol
- Around 9 million children in the EU are living with one parent addicted to alcohol
- 1 of 4 road fatalities in EU are due to alcohol; in 2010 nearly 31,000 Europeans were killed on the roads of which 25% were related to alcohol
- Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to birth defects and developmental disorders. It may cause the unborn child physical, behavioural and learning disabilities
- The social cost attributable to alcohol is 155,8 billion Euro yearly (was third is now first bullet point)
- Alcohol is the leading risk for ill-health and premature death for the core of the working age population (25-59 year) (was first is now second bullet point)
- Alcohol is responsible 1 in 7 male deaths and 1 in 13 female deaths in the group aged 15–64 years, resulting in approximately 120 000 premature deaths

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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The European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with 57 member organisations across 25 European countries advocating prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. Member organisations are involved in advocacy and research, as well as in the provision of information and training on alcohol issues and the service for people whose lives are affected by alcohol problems.