



Statement by the European Public Health Alliance to the 64th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, Copenhagen, 15-18 September 2014 on the European Child and Adolescent Health Strategy 2015-2020 (Agenda item 5c(i))
September 2014

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are pleased to read a statement from the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), supported by Eurochild, Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), National Roma Centrum and European Child Safety Alliance.

As a comprehensive approach to the achievement of good health and well-being, tackling health inequalities early and giving every child the best start to life, we welcome the proposed European Child and Adolescent Health Strategy 2015-2020. We call on European Ministers of Health to endorse the proposed framework and to give priority to its implementation.

Achieving a healthy and inequality-free start - where no child is left behind – is one of the most important ways to equip our populations with the tools and skills to maintain health and well-being throughout life. We know there are good measures for comprehensive protection and promotion of child and adolescent health in place across the Region, and the evidence base for action has expanded significantly. A wealth of data pouring in on the current economic crisis and the impact of austerity measures on health and well-being should provide an impetus for innovative and ambitious mechanisms to invest in well-being of all people living in Europe. We call on Ministers to take concrete steps to do more and better in supporting early child development, protect children from growing up in poverty, including through addressing the social, economic, environmental, biomedical and commercial determinants of health, thereby making a strong case for good governance for health where child's best interest – including those of particularly vulnerable background - is firmly put at heart of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to policy-making fit for the 21st century.

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We call on Ministers to firmly put in the center of this proposed strategy a vision for achieving a tobacco-free millennial generation, where more innovative and regulatory policy interventions find their way into governments' considerations. Increasing the price of tobacco by rising taxes is the single most effective way of decreasing consumption, in particular among the adolescents. Bigger graphic pictures and plain packaging reduce the attractiveness of tobacco products' packages; strong promotion of smoke-free public space offer additional protection of the child population from direct and indirect exposure to tobacco smoke and help to de-normalise tobacco use. Likewise, a similar approach should find its way into re-evaluation of national strategies devoted to promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, as well as tracking progress on tackling consumption of unhealthy foods, sugary drinks and alcohol, and the prevention of injuries.

Wholeheartedly, we agree that children and adolescents have a right to be seen and heard. On the other hand, the governments have an obligation to see and listen to them, and not to disregard their fully valid health and social experience while policy planning and implementation. Children growing up in institutional care, of minority or migrant background are particularly invisible and vulnerable. We recommend that the Member States better focus on systematic rights-based, evidence-informed and gender-sensitive maternal, child and adolescent policies and assessments of the quality of care, ensure universal access to maternal and child health services, deploy to full potential simple, cost-effective public health interventions such as vaccination, as well as adequate protection from exposure to violence and maltreatment, exploitation and the resulting injuries – dossiers rightfully already on the agenda elsewhere of this 64th meeting of the Regional Committee (the European Vaccination Action Plan 2015-2020 and the Child Maltreatment Strategy).

We express our appreciation for your attention and continued commitment to a comprehensive strategy for the advancement of child and adolescent health and well-being in Europe by 2020. To this result, please be assured of the overwhelming support and readiness to assist you among civil society organisations.

Thank you.

EPHA is the European Platform bringing together organisations from the public health community, representing health professionals, patient groups, health promotion and disease specific organisations and health NGOs. EPHA receives financial support from the European Commission, via the Public Health Programme of the European Union.
