



Public health research

EUPHA has a strong interest in European health research.

An annual international health research meeting has been organised since 1989; EUPHA's publication, the European Journal of Public Health, is an authoritative quarterly; and EUPHA's constituent membership associations represent leading health researchers in over 20 European countries.

EUPHA collaborated with the EC research directorate in developing public health research under Biomed I and II and the Fifth Framework Programme. Commission services have accepted invitations to present these programmes at EUPHA meetings, and public health research teams have contended for, and won, contracts.

We are therefore pleased that DG health and Consumer Affairs wishes to take up public health research for discussion at the Forum. We are aware that the subject has been on the agenda for the High Level Committee, although we are not aware of the detail of these discussions. This reflects one aspect of the issue – that Ministries of Health themselves have complex relationships with research funders, structures and researchers in their own countries, and representatives at the High Level Committee are usually not themselves directly involved with research issues.

We would suggest the following areas of concern for discussion by the Forum:

1. The research programme of Sanco. Over the past ten years, the Public Health Unit has been able to fund public health research and development from various budget lines of the action programme. Historical factors led to greatest funding on cancer and Aids, and perhaps limited funding for other equally significant public health areas. We suggest that there could be greater transparency in appointing representatives to the advisory committees, including NGOs equally with national government appointees. EUPHA and other NGOs can also contribute to indicating priorities for research, for example in responding to issues identified in reports and publications. EUPHA would like to see more research that is co-operative between partners in European countries.
2. Sanco and the Research Directorate. Sanco has a relatively small budget for its programmes (although we note that there is a 2% levy on the CAP tobacco fund also available.) We recognise the long procedure used for developing the 6th research programme, the contribution of Sanco to that process, and the range of other influences in the final outcome. However, we are disappointed that, as we understand it, public health has not received separate recognition in the new programme, in contrast to other biomedical research 'priorities' such as molecular science and genetics – which may have been urged by commercial considerations rather than for the public health. In relation to current discussions on consolidating health within a single Chapter of the EU Treaty, we would like encourage more funding for research within Sanco (as is the case for other EC directorates including transport and agriculture).
3. EUPHA would like to engage in a more structured discussion of priorities and practice of the research programme. The current DG Research public health call within 'quality of life' leads to open submission, and the choice is guided by 'scientific standards' rather than areas of research priority. We believe there could be more open debate on the priority areas (for example, for example, evaluations of different systems of care, implementation of policies, infrastructures for provision). We would also like to encourage a review the mechanisms used for selection and the contracting arrangements.
4. National research. Part of the agenda for the European Commission is to support the development of good practice across member states. We suggest that this may apply to health research, where there does not appear to be much exchange between ministries or national research bodies. The

European Science Foundation appears to take a selective approach to public health research. We would encourage exchange of information on research programmes between countries, and evidence for good practice from differences between countries. Ministries of Health have an important part to play in this exchange, and in strengthening European public health and health services research.

EUPHA is grateful to provide input into development of the strategy for public health research, and offers contributions to this process from scientific experts and professional associations.