



Re: Informal Meeting of Ministers of Health

Brussels, 21 September 2015

Dear Ministers,

In view of the upcoming Informal Meeting of Ministers of Health on 24-25 September, Eurodiaconia would like to bring to your attention a topic of key relevance: the need for quality and innovative strategies to deal with persons with dementia more effectively.

The human and financial costs of dementia are of a worrying magnitude and are only expected to grow over the next years due to ageing populations in the EU. However, in most Member States, healthcare systems and social services are not ready to face this challenge and require large improvements to give adequate support to people suffering from dementia, as well as their relatives and friends.

The European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations and subsequent policy initiatives stressed the key importance of adequate environments to tackle with declining health in the EU. The European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing, stemming from the Europe 2020 strategy, specifically established a platform of exchange of good practice and promotion of innovative ways to tackle age-related issues. In addition to this, meeting the needs of a growing population of older people facing dementia is essential to release the full potential of what is often addressed as the 'silver economy', with clear opportunities for job creation in the health and care sectors.

Therefore, the support of quality dementia-related services which deliver in the three key areas of prevention and health promotion, care and cure, and active and independent living of elderly people should be at the core of policy priorities across the EU. The time has come for the EU to take the lead in ensuring that the situation of people with dementia experiencing unacceptably low levels of life quality, as well as the situation of their potential supporters (family, neighbours, friends), including the removal of obstacles to their labour market attachment, is significantly improved.

Eurodiaconia is a dynamic, Europe-wide community of social and health care organisations with direct experience in providing services to persons with dementia and advocating for their fundamental needs. As a result of our members' longstanding track record in providing quality, innovative and effective services for persons with dementia, Eurodiaconia recently produced a brochure highlighting some of their initiatives in the field. Drawing on members' experience, the document identifies key messages and pressing challenges aimed to raise awareness amongst decision makers and strategic partners.

Dementia care calls for an individual approach where tailor-made services put the needs of users, their relatives and friends at the centre of care provision. In this way, services should adapt specifically to the degree of dementia being dealt with, the environment and users' family situations.

- We recommend that steps are taken to ensure that **the voice and rights of users are heard at all stages of service provision** as best as possible. In addition, the needs of users' families should also be taken into account. **User empowerment** constitutes the best way to safeguard users' dignity and

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protect them from physical, mental and financial abuse. Importantly, **user involvement also needs to be viewed as an opportunity to boost quality standards** in care services and to maintain a relative level of autonomy for people with dementia.

Dementia is a complex, multifaceted condition, where the added value of an integrated approach towards social service provision becomes particularly clear.

- We recommend that you take action towards the **integration of services both across care settings and throughout the care pathway**, as this would enable significant **life quality gains** for users. Moreover, the integration of services is an opportunity to **attain significant efficiency gains** which are key to guarantee the sustainability of care provision.

Sustainability is all the more important as ensuring adequate funding for dementia services becomes a rising challenge in view of growing outlays to be faced in the coming years and decades. While service providers are committed to giving best value for money without overlooking quality standards, contracting authorities should in turn be equally committed to ensuring adequate and continued funding across the whole cycle of service provision. This is key to guarantee the sustainability of service provision as well as to minimise the disruptive effects of discontinuities in service provision, which are severe for persons suffering dementia.

- We call for a renewed commitment to ensure that **quality is, in every case, kept at the forefront during the phases of organisation, funding and evaluation of service provision**. In particular, specific attention should be given to **staff development**, as improvements in skill levels, a better definition of career paths or the creation of the right incentives to reduce staff turnover, will have major effects on the quality of the overall service provided.

The magnitude of the challenge associated with dementia calls for help from as many sources as possible to bring in all relevant expertise and to take full advantage of synergies that could be established between different actors such as health professionals, volunteers, IT companies and Alzheimer's associations, among others.

- For this reason, we recommend that you facilitate and promote **partnership opportunities and coalitions** that improve service delivery, raise awareness, avoid stigmatisation and break taboos regarding dementia.

We ask that you carefully consider these proposals and remain at your disposal for further information.

Sincerely,



Heather Roy, Secretary General