

Manifesto 2009 European Elections

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) aims to improve health on the island of Ireland capitalising on benefits from North South cooperation. Our focus is tackling health inequalities¹ and influencing public policies in favour of health.

IPH recognises the important role the European Union (EU) plays in influencing the health of those living on the island, North and South, and the wider European community. Article 152 of the Amsterdam Treaty provides limited specific competence in the area of health. However the EU has significant influence in other policy sectors such as agriculture, trade and employment, whose actions have important implications for public health. The EU can also direct community action towards prevention by promoting research into the causes of disease, as well as health information and education.

The 2009 European Elections provide an opportunity to influence health at local and European Government level. Elected European representatives are in a position to be strong advocates for the improved public health of those they represent and all European citizens. They can influence action in reducing the wide health inequalities that exist across Ireland, North and South as well as across Europe; ensure EU action on public health risks such as diabetes and road accidents; and take measures to improve and strengthen EU health information to improve decision-making on health across the EU.

IPH has identified 5 areas of action for MEPs and political parties.

- 1 Tackling health inequalities
- 2 Coordinated action on priority public health conditions
- 3 Health impact assessments of all EU policies
- 4 Strengthening information to help decision-making
- 5 Supporting a public health strategy for Europe

¹ **Health inequalities** Those who are poorer or disadvantaged are more likely to face more illness during their lifetime and die younger than those who are better off. The chances of a long and healthy life are not the same for everyone. Health inequalities refer to the unfair or unjust nature of health differences between social groups, generated by social conditions.

1 Tackling health inequalities

Health inequalities are a key issue in Ireland, North and South and in Europe. Social, economic and environmental conditions play a major role in determining health. The poorer people are, the more their health will suffer. Health inequalities are inequitable and unjust and need to be addressed between and within EU countries. The current economic downturn makes protecting the most vulnerable an urgent issue, and EU economic and social welfare policies need to be strengthened.

EU commitment is needed to implement the recommendations of the final report of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health entitled 'Closing the Gap in a Generation. Health equity through action on the social determinants of health'.

IPH calls for all MEPs to advocate for social, economic and environmental conditions that promote health and reduce health inequalities and support the EU Director-General for 'Health and Consumers' (DG SANCO) Communication on EU action to reduce health inequalities.

2 Action on priority public health conditions

Diseases do not respect national borders. Across Europe there are high levels of preventable chronic conditions. The potential Influenza A (H1N1) pandemic reinforces the critical need for effective and coordinated planning across Europe and the importance of working in partnership with others such as the World Health Organization. Obesity is another example of a condition which needs coordinated action across all EU policies to tackle the rising levels of related illnesses, such as diabetes. MEPs should ensure tackling communicable and chronic diseases is a priority within all EU health strategies. Support is needed for National Public Health Institutes and agencies and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

IPH calls for all MEPs to emphasise the need for coordinated action on priority public health conditions between and within countries.

3 Health impact assessments² of all EU policies

Implementation of mandatory health impact assessments of all EU policies is needed to achieve better decisions for health. MEPs need to ensure that all EU policies protect the health of all including the most vulnerable in society.

Health should be integrated into all EU policies including transport and agriculture. According to the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC), 43,000 people were killed in road traffic collisions in the European Union in 2007 (ETSC 2008).

² **Health Impact Assessment** reviews how a proposal impacts either positively or negatively on health and makes suggestions as to how to enhance or mitigate these impacts.

IPH calls for the EU to set a target to reduce road deaths by 40% from 2010 to 2020 by implementing new measures that focus on the main risk factors in road transport: speeding, drink driving and the non use of seat belts.

Making health a stronger driver in food and agricultural policy is a crucial step in supporting health. A health promoting CAP would play a major role in efforts to halt the rising prevalence of obesity and diabetes and help prevent coronary heart disease.

IPH calls on all MEPs to support the implementation of mandatory health impact assessments of all EU policies.

4 Strengthening information to help decision-making

Better information systems are critical within the EU. It is important that basic data systems, including routine monitoring of health inequity and the social determinants of health, are in place alongside mechanisms to ensure data can be understood and applied to develop more effective policies, systems, and programmes.

Good data at an EU level is needed to ensure effective EU policies. MEPs need to ensure that all population health observatories are adequately funded.

IPH calls for all MEPS to support sustained funding for health data and information systems throughout Europe.

5 A public health strategy for Europe

MEPs support is needed in the implementation of the EU health strategy 'Together for Health, a strategic approach for the EU 2008-2013'. Public health challenges that need to be addressed include population ageing, rising mental illness and chronic disease, including the dramatic increase of diabetes related to rising obesity. Life expectancy in Europe is generally improving but new challenges need to be tackled otherwise this will reverse.

The EU has the responsibility to undertake actions which complement the work done by Member States, for example in relation to cross border health threats, patient mobility, and reducing health inequalities. The EU health strategy 'Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013' aims to provide an overarching strategic framework spanning core issues in health as well as health in all policies and global health issues. Principles include taking a value-driven approach, recognising the links between health and economic prosperity, integrating health in all policies, and strengthening the EU's voice in global health.

IPH calls for all MEPs to provide the leadership and support needed to effectively implement 'Together for health, a strategic approach for the EU 2008-2013'.

What does IPH want elected representatives to do in Europe?

- Advocate for social, economic and environmental conditions that promote health and reduce health inequalities.
- Emphasise the need for coordinated action on priority public health conditions between and within countries.
- Support the implementation of mandatory health impact assessments of all EU policies.
- Argue for sustained funding for health data information systems.
- Seek Pan-European commitment to implementation of the EU health strategy.

What can IPH do to help elected representatives in Europe?

IPH can help by:

- Providing information on the social determinants of health from an island-wide perspective.
- Providing data on a range of local level indicators.
- Providing links with international research as a member of the International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI) and the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA).

See www.publichealth.ie

IPH Resources

IPH has undertaken work supporting the issues raised.

Farrell, C., McAvoy, H., Wilde, J. and Combat Poverty Agency (2008) Tackling health inequalities – an all-Ireland approach to Social Determinants. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency/ Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

Higgins, C., Lavin, T. and Metcalfe, O (2008) Health impacts of education: a review. Dublin: Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

McAvoy, H. (2008) Annual update on fuel poverty and health. Dublin: Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

Jordan, A., Graham, A., Balanda, K. and Fahy, L (2007) Making diabetes count. What does the future hold? Dublin: Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

Lavin, T., Higgins, C., Metcalfe, O and Jordan, A (2006) Health impacts of the built environment: a review. Dublin: Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

Doyle, C., Kavanagh, P., Metcalfe, O and Lavin, T (2005) Health impacts of employment: a review. Dublin: Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

Kavanagh, P., Doyle, C and Metcalfe, O (2005) Health impacts of transport: a review. Dublin: Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

All IPH resources are available from our website

www.publichealth.ie