

Abysmal decisions: Why the EC's medicinal units shouldn't be moved to DG Industry

by TIM REED

✘ Last week, European Commission (EC) president-elect, Jean-Claude Juncker, announced his plan to move the units responsible for pharmaceutical policy from their rightful place at DG Health to the commercially-focused DG for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs.

Health Action International (HAI) Europe and other civil society organisations working on medicines policy were shocked and outraged. This decision—which appears to have been made in consultation with the pharmaceutical industry—puts the commercial interests of that industry, rather than patients and consumers, at the heart of European medicines policy. It also jeopardises the potential to improve clinical trial data transparency. (For more on that, read our 12 September [media statement](#).)

It was just recently, in 2009, that the EC made the decision to shift medicines policy from DG Enterprise and Industry to DG Health and Consumers. This was the proper place for it, given that the Health Commissioner's mandate is to protect citizens' health and well-being while the Industry Commissioner's mandate is to promote the competitiveness of European industry and the economy.

On Tuesday, HAI Europe, together with 27 other concerned health and consumer NGOs throughout Europe, sent an [open letter](#) to Mr Juncker. In it, we asked him to prioritise health interests and reverse his unjustified decision.

To complement this action, HAI Europe also sent an email directly to all Members of the European Parliament and health attachés, urging each of them to act in the best interest of public health and to raise this issue through a question to their new Commissioner.

Here's our email to them:

Dear Honourable Member of the European Parliament / Health Attaché
Health Action International (HAI) and our partners in the European medicines policy community were shocked to learn of Jean-Claude Juncker's decision to transfer SANCO Units D5 (Medicinal Products–Authorisations, European Medicines Agency) and D6 (Medicinal Products–Quality, Safety and Efficacy) from the DG for Health to the DG for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs.

As a civil society organisation that strives to improve affordable access and rational use of medicines, HAI is completely dismayed and appalled by this decision. We are therefore writing to ask you, as a representative of European citizens' interests, to do everything within your power to ensure this decision is reversed. Specifically, we request that you raise the point through a question to your new Commissioner.

Moving these medicinal units to the DG for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and

SMEs is problematic for numerous reasons. It:

- puts the commercial interests of the pharmaceutical industry ahead of the public health interests of patients and consumers. This is surely not the signal that the EU would wish to give its citizens—nor observers in the rest of the world.
- places profit-driven interests, rather than legitimate public health needs, at the centre of European policymaking on medicines. This is of great concern given the numerous examples, over the years, of commercial interests being at odds with public health interests.
- creates an unacceptable conflict of interest. The regulation of medicines is the interface between the EU's mandate to protect citizens' health and the commercial interests of the pharmaceutical industry. There can be no conflict of interest between the regulators and the regulated. By locating the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in the DG that is mandated to promote the interests of European business, the European Commission will be allowing a massive conflict of interest to unfairly influence European medicines policy.

Indeed, this is not the first time that the responsibility for medicines has moved. In 2009, it came as a relief that pharmaceutical policy was rightly moved from the DG for Enterprise and Industry to the DG for Health and Consumers as part of its mission to protect and promote the health of European citizens. We cannot allow for a retrograde move, like president-elect Juncker's, to be made.

You will find, enclosed, a [letter](#) that we sent to President-elect Jean-Claude Juncker today urging him to reconsider. Please, join us in our efforts to keep medicines policy where it rightfully belongs—within the DG that is responsible for health.

Kind regards,

Tim Reed

Executive Director

Health Action International

Today, HAI Europe renews its call for MEPs and health attachés to take whatever action they can to stand against the decision to transfer these health units to the DG for Industry. We also continue to call on Mr Juncker reverse this decision.