Future MEPs: take control to ensure access to medicines

In a joint call, 12 public health organisations from 5 EU member states urge prospective Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to safeguard access to affordable medicines. Access to medical products is increasingly under pressure in the EU. The price of new medicines is often excessively high. As a result, they become unaffordable for patients who pay out of pocket and when reimbursed, the high costs place a heavy burden on countries' health budgets. The next European Parliament, elected in June, should promote the necessary measures and safeguards to ensure fair pricing and access for all.

The elections for the European Parliament will take place from 6 to 9 June 2024. Re-elected and new MEPs then have the opportunity and responsibility to protect and promote the health of all people living in the EU. This includes restoring the balance of power between governments and pharmaceutical companies to ensure that medicines and other health products are available for everyone at an affordable price.

Interests of patients first

Wemos and Health Action International (HAI), two Dutch public health organisations, took the initiative for this urgent call. Aliénor Devalière, senior global health advocate at Wemos: "This joint call to safeguard key principles for access to medicines is crucial as a new European Parliament is about to be elected. Regardless of their political parties, future MEPs have a major role to play in ensuring that the interests and concerns of patients come first in the face of the huge pharmaceutical lobby."

Jaume Vidal, senior policy advisor at HAI: "We are at a critical juncture for access to medicines in Europe. Recent discussions on pharmaceutical legislation, medicine shortages and the use of compulsory licenses to reduce medicine costs have highlighted the important role that the European Parliament plays in this endeavor. We do have a choice and we need to make an informed decision to ensure that access to medicines remains a priority in Brussels and elsewhere."

Transparency and conditions to public funding

According to the signatories of the call, the current system of medicine development is more focused on making as much profit as possible rather than helping as many patients as possible. Pharmaceutical companies are given a monopoly on new medicines and can charge extremely high and opaque rates, even if these medicines are partly developed with public funding.

Pharmaceutical companies have disproportionate power when it comes to availability and pricing of new medicines. As health, including sustainable and timely access to medicines, is a fundamental need and human right, governments should take the lead and ensure access to needed treatments for all populations. Especially since most medical innovations are made possible by public research programmes and taxpayers' money.

In their joint call, the organisations urge the next European Parliament to restore the power balance and take control when it comes to access to and pricing of new medicines. MEPs should promote the necessary measures to do so, such as enforcing transparency about the costs and pricing of new medicines and attaching conditions to public funding of research and development to guarantee public return on public investment.

Signatories

The call is signed by 12 public health organisations from the EU: HAI, Wemos and the Pharmaceutical Accountability Foundation from the Netherlands, Salud por Derecho and Asociación Acceso Justo al Medicamento from Spain, Access to Medicines Ireland, Consumers' Association "The Quality of Life" from Greece, the Romanian Association Against AIDS, the Association of European Cancer Leagues, the European AIDS Treatment Group, the European Fair Pricing Network, and Universities Allied for Essential Medicines Europe.

Read the full letter here