

Make good on access to medicine commitments HAI asks new Dutch Health Minister

In a [letter](#) to the recently appointed Dutch Minister of Health, Wellbeing and Sport, Ernst Kuipers, Health Action International has commended his past comments on transparency and access to medicines, and called on him to use his influence with European Union (EU) allies to break the impasse on [the TRIPS Waiver](#).

The [letter \(in Dutch\)](#), we also praise the support of the Netherlands for the World Health Organization's [COVID-19 Technology Access Pool](#) (C-TAP), but note the lack of political and material support from other EU Member States, and asks for Dutch action among European allies to change this.

Text of the Letter in English:

Dear Minister Kuipers,

We wish to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Minister van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport.

The task that lies ahead is an unenviable one at a time in which the ability of national governments and public institutions to ensure the health and welfare of the people is being put to the test.

In that light, your extensive career in healthcare, including as Chair of the Erasmus MC Board of Directors, will be of great benefit to you and the Ministry. We are particularly encouraged by your previous outspoken commitment to greater transparency in the quest for more affordable medicines in the Netherlands, as [expressed as part of a Health Action International campaign](#) to hold the Dutch government to account on this critical matter.

Now, two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, we still witness inequalities and imbalances that are taking a heavy toll in households all over the world. While people living in the Netherlands have access to a complete vaccination scheme, including boosters, many front-line healthcare workers, and vulnerable people, mainly in the Global South, remain unvaccinated.

We commend the Netherlands for its early endorsement of the World Health Organization's COVID-19 Technologies Access Pool (C-TAP) and generous donations to the Covax facility. Unfortunately, these initiatives are falling short on their promises and failing to respond to global needs for therapeutics, diagnostics and vaccines. The Netherlands can play an important role in convincing other European countries to support C-TAP, politically and

materially, while holding Covax partners, including pharmaceutical companies, accountable for missed goals and delays.

Another initiative—South Africa and India’s proposal to temporarily waive certain dispositions of the TRIPS agreement for COVID-19 health goods to scale up production and improve access conditions— remains in limbo. Although now co-sponsored by over 60 countries (and supported by over 100), the European Commission on behalf of the European Union (EU), UK and Switzerland continue to oppose and block text-based negotiations.

Your predecessor publicly declared in Parliament—and in a [written response](#) to our calls for action—that the Dutch government would support a partial relaxation of intellectual property protection for COVID-19 vaccines, but that this position was not shared by a majority within the European Council. We believe it is time for the Netherlands to step up, increase pressure among EU allies, and continue the Netherlands’ long tradition as a champion of international cooperation and pharmaceutical policy based on justice and fairness. You have shown in the past your commitment, now you are in a position to make change happen.

We are confident you will act on our calls to use your influence among EU allies to provide support for C-TAP and hold Covax partners accountable, and to end the blocking of the TRIPS waiver proposal.

We look forward to working with you in your new role.