

Media Release: Soaring Medicine Prices the Target Of New Public Campaign Ahead Of 15 March Election

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AMSTERDAM—A campaign launched by Health Action International today calls on political candidates running in the Dutch national election to commit to putting an end to soaring medicine prices in The Netherlands, where expenditure on the highest-priced pharmaceuticals has reached €1.7 billion per year.

“Prices are skyrocketing. It’s completely unsustainable. To make matters worse, there’s absolutely no transparency in how the pharmaceutical industry determine their prices. Our political leaders must act before it’s too late,” said Tim Reed, Executive Director of the Amsterdam-based medicines campaigning organisation, Health Action International.

The ‘Our Medicines, Our Right’ campaign asks citizens to sign the petition calling on the new government, which will be elected on 15 March, to:

1. Take necessary measures to make the real price paid for medicines by governments, hospitals and other purchasers, public information. Currently, buyers cannot disclose this information because of secrecy clauses in contracts with pharmaceutical companies.
2. Force pharmaceutical companies to publicly report the actual cost of researching and developing a medicine. Pharmaceutical companies keep these costs secret to justify high medicine prices.
3. Ensure that biomedical innovation that is partially or fully funded by taxpayers results in medicines that meet current health needs and are affordable and accessible. Currently, taxpayers are funding the development of medicines that are then patented by the pharmaceutical industry and sold back to them at exorbitant prices.

Professor Doctor Ernst Kuipers, Chair of the Board of Directors at Erasmus Medical Centre in Rotterdam, said he supports the campaign based on the fact that prices for expensive medicines at his hospital alone have grown by 80 percent—from €100 million to €180 million—in just seven years.

“While I hope that more new medicines come onto the market in the coming years, if prices continue to rise so steeply, these drugs will become simply unaffordable—even in a rich country like The Netherlands,” Kuipers said. “We need parliament to step up and act, or else hospitals will no longer be able to guarantee patients with access to these expensive medicines. We’ll be forced to ration or refuse access to some forms of treatment and this is unacceptable.”

This scenario also worries Anita Frehe, a breast cancer patient from Zuidhorn who received a high-priced cancer drug, Pertuzumab, which is estimated to cost €54,000 per year.

“Going forward, I hope anyone who’s in a similar situation to me will be able to access the medicines they need,” said Frehe. “I’ve heard it said that these are expensive medicines, but are they really that expensive, or is it mainly profit going back to the company at the expense of the patients?”

The campaign, supported by a range of organisations including KWF Kankerbestrijding and Aidsfonds, features video interviews with Professor Doctor Kuipers and Anita Frehe. They form part of series of social media materials aimed at spreading awareness of the issue of rising medicines prices during the election season. The campaign asks the Dutch public to sign a petition addressed to Dutch parliamentarians and political candidates. With enough support, the campaign hopes to take its message and petition directly to members of the new parliament.

Note to editors:

- In 2014, The Netherlands spent €1.7 billion providing expensive medicines to 147,000 patients in 2014. On average, that’s €11,564 per treatment.
- Some medicines are even estimated to cost four to five times that. For example:
 - €54,000 per patient, per year, for Pertuzumab (breast cancer)
 - €52,000 for a 12 week treatment of Sofosbovir (for Hepatitis C)
 - €50,000 per patient, per year for Nivolumab (lung cancer)
- The Zorginstituut Nederland [even recommended](#) that we refuse to pay for some new medicines because the prices are so high.
- The Nederlandse Vereniging van Ziekenhuizen have [written to the current government](#) warning that if nothing changes, hospitals simply won’t have enough money to pay their medicines bill.

Additional information about the impact of the out-of-balance patent system on medicine prices is also available at www.accesstomedicines.org.

The ‘Our Medicines, Our Right’ campaign is endorsed by:

KWF Kankerbestrijding

Borstkankervereniging Nederland

Aidsfonds

Diabetes Fonds

Nierpatiënten Vereniging Nederland (NVN)

Nierstichting

Fair Medicine

Wemos

Instituut voor Verantwoord Medicijngebruik

Longfonds

Hartstichting

Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM) Nederland

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[Health Action International](#) is the only non-governmental organisation entirely dedicated to strengthening pharmaceutical policy to improve public health. Our staff and global network of members have expertise in virtually all areas of medicines policy, including the price, availability and affordability of medicines, clinical data transparency, intellectual property and pharmaceutical marketing. We pursue advocacy at the patient level and up to the highest levels of government through our 'official relations' status with the World Health Organization and respected relationship with the European Medicines Agency. We are financially independent from the pharmaceutical industry.

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