

Talking Medicine Pricing

We recently published the report [Medicine Pricing and Access in Europe and Beyond](#) in which we examine issues related to medicine pricing and some of the actions already taken to address them by the European Union (EU) and its Member States.

Medicine pricing has been a hot topic for some time now, and this new report gave us the chance to discuss actions that have been already put in place, and can still be taken, to positively impact on medicine pricing by EU Member States (with the Netherlands and Italy as primary examples), the EU as an organisation and international bodies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO).

To inject some more energy into this discussion, which has waned somewhat with attention being focused specifically on COVID-19, we brought together individuals and groups from within the access to medicines movement to discuss what role civil society can play in this process and how to continue our advocacy among policymakers and other stakeholders.

The meeting was led by HAI Senior Policy Advisor, [Jaume Vidal](#), who explained the major impact pricing has on patients' ability to access needed medicines, as well as other health technologies. Excessive and unaffordable medicine prices are a significant global challenge, with governments, international organisations and technical agencies scrambling to respond with varying degrees of success. High prices can affect the economic sustainability of public health systems and, in the case of non-reimbursed products, can place patients faced with out-of-the-pocket expenses under catastrophic financial stress.

Jaume highlighted for us the important initiatives already in place to curb medicine prices and improve transparency, including the [HAI/WHO Pricing Methodology](#), which helps governments obtain reliable information on the price, availability and affordability of medicines to develop sound medicine pricing policies and to evaluate the impact of policy implementation. At an EU level, he talked about, among other things, the various [cross-country cooperation schemes](#) that have emerged in recent years, such as the Beneluxa initiative.

Jaume concluded his presentation by sharing recommendations on how the WHO, EU and national governments can work towards curbing medicines prices, which centre around improved transparency and increased collaboration between stakeholders. (See the [report](#) for more details)

The discussion that followed Jaume's presentation was lively, with useful interventions from a number of civil society representatives. That being said, it also exemplified the importance of continuing to push on this matter. While positive steps have been made in some areas, and by some Member States, it is clear there is a long way to go before we are where we would like to be in terms of improving access to affordable medicines in Europe, with transparency

(or lack thereof) being an ever present problem.

What Next?

Participants agreed that civil society has a role to play to push for more transparency. In countries where insurances bear most (or even all) costs for medicines, citizens are often not aware of prices. They, therefore, do not push their policymakers to increase transparency. It is the role of civil society organisations to bring this to the public's attention and simultaneously advocate with decision-makers in improving transparency around the real costs and prices of medicines.

In the coming months, HAI's partners at [EPHA](#) and European Alliance for Responsible R&D and Affordable Medicines will organise follow-up webinars on this topic to ensure that medicine pricing stays on the agenda of the EU and Member States. We too will continue to press the issue, and will communicate this in the coming weeks and months!