

COVID-19: Future of Pharmaceuticals

Webinar - 19 June 2020

We welcome the opportunity, together with other public interest civil society organisations, to engage with Members of the European Parliament and representatives of the European Commission in a discussion with profound implications not only for the future of our societies, but also that of the European Union (EU).

It would be a mistake to look at the COVID-19 pandemic as an isolated phenomenon. As the competition to find a safe and effective response shows, it feeds on a set of pre-existing conditions affecting the access to medicines continuum:

- Misalignment of research priorities and health needs
- Lack of transparency (R&D costs, prices, clinical trial data)
- Misuse and abuse of Intellectual property incentives

It would be erroneous to think that we can overcome this current challenge without addressing these underlying factors. Even though we positively note the leadership shown by certain European Union institutions, concerns remain about some of the measures being announced. Take, for example, support for non-transparent public-private partnerships and negotiation of exclusive Advanced Market Commitment deals for potential vaccines. It is not clear whether these can really be effective in bringing about the truly global response that the European Commission and EU Member States have repeatedly proclaimed as their goal.

Furthermore, we must express our concerns regarding the lack of civil society participation in critical exchanges—such as those taking place behind closed doors between public officials and pharmaceutical companies, or in the proposed institutional structure around the response to COVID-19. As it is the case with public return on public investment, you cannot have good governance without transparency and accountability.

We have faith in the part played by legislative bodies to hold the executive to account. In these trying times, the role of the European Parliament is more important than ever. Improving access to medicines for everyone, everywhere should not be a partisan issue. That is why, together with MSF Access Campaign, we are proud to co-host the European Parliament Working Group on Innovation, Access to Medicines and Poverty-related Diseases (EPWG). The EPWG is a space for sharing information and raising awareness around dossiers and topics relevant to access to medicines, such as funding conditionalities, medicine shortages or pharmaceutical strategy proposals. We look forward to continuing to work with the EPWG and all of you to improve access to medicines and vaccines.

