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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

14 JANUARY – 20 JANUARY 2023

CHANGES TO THE PHARMACEUTICALS LAW ENVISAGED BY THE EU

On 17 January EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides announced that the revision to a European Union pharmaceuticals law will include stronger medical supply obligations and earlier notifications of shortages. The revision is planned for March.

Commissioner said that antibiotics shortages have become an acute problem for many European countries. According to the European Medicines Agency (EMA), 26 European countries reported this issue. The amendment aims to secure access to medicines for patients and avoid any market disruption of medicines in the EU.

Kyriakides stressed that the early spike in respiratory infections in Europe and insufficient production capacity are the core shortage causes. Numerous MEPs also opined on this topic, urging to tackle this issue as a matter of urgency. Nevertheless, some experts say that shortages of essential generic medicines, like antibiotics, are likely to be recurrent in Europe due to problems in the sector, such as the gradual migration of generic manufacturing to Asia.

As informed, the EU is deploying all regulatory options and negotiating with the companies to increase production. Moreover, the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), could procure medicines and medical supplies on behalf of EU MS to facilitate the process.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-plans-changes-pharma-law-avoid-future-shortages-medicines-health-commissioner-2023-01-17/>

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SETS UP A SUB-COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH

On 18 January three biggest parties – Christian democrats (EPP), socialists (S&D), and liberals (Renew Europe) – struck an agreement on establishing a new permanent sub-committee on public health in the European Parliament (EP). Once the mandate is agreed upon, a draft will be sent to the Parliament’s plenary for the final vote expected on 2 February in Brussels.

Public health is one of the many competencies of the EP’s environment committee (ENVI), which is mainly responsible for environmental policy, public health and chemicals legislation, and food safety issues, including veterinary legislation. Political groups opined the scope is too much for one committee, given the increased focus on the importance of health after COVID-19. Over the past years, two special committees on health issues with a time-limited mandate were established – the EU’s beating cancer plan (BECA), and the other overseeing lessons learned from the pandemic (COVI). Although possessing specific subjects, special committees can’t adopt legislative or binding texts.

In November 2021, the center-right European People’s Party (EPP), initiated the idea of a standing sub-committee on health within ENVI. There are currently three other subcommittees in the EP: human rights (DROI) and security and defence (SEDE), both connected to the foreign affairs (AFET) committee, and fiscal matters (FISC) which is linked to the committee on economic affairs (ECON). Sub-committees do not have their activities; they only report to their main committee.

Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/european-parliament-to-set-up-a-standing-dedicated-health-forum/>

THE CONSTANT PUSH TO CLOSE VACCINATION GAPS

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic's peak has probably passed, vaccination is still a hot topic in the EU. Looking at lessons learned, policymakers can conclude - while many were happy to get their shots, some pushback persists.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated before the pandemic that vaccines prevent up to 5 million deaths annually worldwide. The State of Vaccine Confidence in the European Union 2022 found that despite these benefits, vaccine confidence in Europe has fallen in 2022 in comparison to 2020, according to the State of Vaccine Confidence in the European Union 2022.

Kristýna Králová from the Czech permanent representation to the EU explained that as many people do not see the benefits of vaccination, uptake rates in Europe “tend to fall”. In his turn, Stefan Schreck, advisor at European Commission's health service (DG SANTE) said that a way out is “closing the existing vaccination gaps, which is particularly important for those in vulnerable and risk groups, improving access to vaccinations, as well as continuing the efforts to increase vaccine confidence”.

To tackle the issue, the Commission stepped up its communication about the vaccine benefits, along with measures to understand people's concerns. The EC also takes steps to address misinformation, including the new code of practice on disinformation, the digital services and European Media Freedom Act, and a review of the European democracy action plan. Other plans include several projects on vaccination hesitancy funded by EU4health, to reduce physical obstacles to vaccination and ensure people's access to reliable information.

Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/health-brief-the-continued-push-to-close-vaccination-gaps/>

Thank you for your attention!

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