



Press Release  
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## **Health systems must reach out to men rather than watch them die**

During the European Health Forum Gastein, which took place in Bad Hofgastein 1-4 October, a heavily attended meeting of senior policy makers agreed on key recommendations to address the poor health and premature death of men across Europe:

- **The role of traditional primary care services must be complemented by outreach interventions following key examples of good practice in the workplace and sports grounds.**
- **The regulator must step in to protect web users of health information, most of which are male, from the dangers of mis-information and counterfeit medicines.**
- **NGOs must increase their pressure on politicians and policy makers to promote equity in health policy.**

The lower life expectancy of men is only to a very limited extent due to genetic determination. Unhealthy lifestyles and poor use of health services are often the main reasons. "This is bad news" says Ian Banks, President of the European Men's Health Forum who is chairing the men's health expert panel. "But the good news is: we can change this."

The meeting organised by the European Men's Health Forum demands a radical change in the attitude of health professionals and health systems towards men's obvious disregard of health issues. "It makes no sense to lament about men neglecting their health when we are just sitting and waiting for them to turn up. If they don't come to us, we have to go to them."

Places of work and sports grounds feature highly among the venues most likely to engage men about their health. Men addressed with health issues in their working or leisure environment are more open to advice and life style changes. Health information communicated in football or rugby stadiums have proven to be very successful, says Banks. Powerful IT systems also exist that can help combine clinical expertise with telephone communications and tailored software to provide health services at a time and place most convenient to patients.

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Health systems must reach out to men rather than watch them die (continued)

Men, particularly professionals aged 45-54 are most likely to choose the convenience of the internet to access health information, buy medicines online and face the dangers of counterfeit medicines. Many have died thinking the drugs they bought over the internet had any active ingredients, says Banks. He adds “The regulator must do more to protect users and give traditional health services the opportunity to step in effectively.”

Banks deplores the fact that there is still too little political support for men’s health issues: “There have already been two reports on women’s health and we are still waiting for the first one on men’s health.” The EU resolution on cancer screening doesn’t address the problem of undifferentiated approach that inevitably results in lower male uptake and delayed diagnosis.

There is little doubt about the urgency of the issue. A striking fact is that low social status affects the health of men far more than women’s. For instance in socially deprived areas of Great Britain male life expectancy can be as low as 54 years whereas it can reach 80 in other areas. “There are no similar variations among women” says Banks, “and this is all the more critical when we know how much the health of men and women are linked. Whoever wants to tackle the problem of health inequalities has to deal with men’s health issues.”

### **For further information:**

The **European Men's Health Forum (EMHF)** is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit making organisation established to raise male awareness across Europe. It aims to promote collaboration between interested individuals and organisations on the development and application of health policies, research, education and prevention programmes. EMHF provides a unique platform for non-discriminatory co-operation and information exchange within Europe and with other countries worldwide.

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The **European Health Forum Gastein** is the most important health policy event in the European Union. Leading experts from business and industry, science and academia, patient organisations/NGOs as well as numerous prominent decision makers in health policy present new ideas and use the EHFG as a platform for the exchange of experiences and opinions at the international level.