

**Recommendations to the Commission following the MED7 public health  
workshop held in Tel-Aviv, 25-26 May 2005**

This document is the outcome of a 2-day workshop on public health held within the framework of the project MED7. Participants included representatives from Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Norway, the Palestinian Authority and Spain (see Annex 1 for list of participants). In addition, input was received from the Commission and the participants who have bi-lateral contacts with scientists in the Maghreb countries (a document from the Algerian Medical National Committee for Genetics was presented).

Having in view the Commission's proposal for FP7, the participants recognized several themes in the '*COOPERATION*' programme which have direct relevance to public health issues. **The participants endorse the outline of the Commission's proposal in relation to public health and wish to see the recommendations detailed below integrated into the specific programmes related to the Mediterranean region.**

The participants emphasize the high potential and added value of regional Mediterranean and European cooperation on public health research activities. This research highly impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and populations, regional economic development, social cohesion and the financing of health and social care systems. Nevertheless, the rather low level of activity and number of projects implemented in this area through previous FPs show that stronger efforts are needed to fully valorize this potential in FP7. **Parallel efforts, by the Commission, the Member States, Associated Countries and the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPC), need to be made in order to promote the success of collaborative projects conducted under the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.**

Public health needs of the Mediterranean countries are very broad. The following recommendations do not, and cannot, encompass all these needs and have therefore been established after a process of systematic selection according to the following:

- **Being of high importance to the development of the public-health situation around the Mediterranean basin.**
- **Taking into consideration the relevance to the public health policies and needs of the EU.**
- **International research and sustainable cooperation being of high added-value in the recommended research-topics.**

While most recommendations fall within theme 1 ('health') of the '*COOPERATION*' programme, some of the issues concerned fall under themes 2, 3 and 8 ('food, agriculture and biotechnology', ICT, and 'socio-economic sciences and the humanities', respectively). Certain recommendations fall also under the '*PEOPLE*' and '*CAPACITIES*' programmes. **The participants note that the FP7 Commission proposal relates to the issues of child health and to the health of the elderly as cross-cutting issues. The participants stress the high relevance of these issues and of gender issues to the public health situation in the MED countries.**

*Topic: Public spectrum of nutritional disorders*

**Under-nutrition, in its two facets, malnutrition and micronutrients deficiencies, is prevalent along the Mediterranean basin across the age-span.** Besides, overweight (including childhood obesity) is also a common observation. Furthermore, existing research in the field suggests that timely intervention such as nutrition education, supplementation and fortification, has been reported to be extremely cost-effective.

Research should focus both on diagnostic and interventional research.

**Recommendations:**

- Study and analysis of predisposing factors and etiological patterns.
- Relation to chronic and other diseases.
- Development of population-based, culturally sensitive lifestyle intervention programmes.
- Research on the variability of nutritional needs.
- Social and cultural determinants of nutritional habits and malnutrition.

*Topic: Major chronic diseases*

**We focus on common chronic diseases/disorders that are responsible for a heavy burden of ill health and show strong variations in occurrence both among and within Mediterranean countries.** These contrasts may facilitate the search for new etiologic factors. Wide scale migration of Mediterranean populations to European countries offers unique opportunities for comparative studies among migrant and host populations concerning morbidity and mortality.

**Recommendations:**

- Epidemiological research and research on the gene-environment interaction in cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and other metabolic syndromes; COPD, cancer (e.g. breast, colon, lung...) and autoimmune diseases.

- Socio-economic and cultural determinants of morbidity and mortality of cardiovascular diseases.
- Study the effect of migration on major chronic diseases.

**Topic: Infectious diseases**

The participants would like to encourage the Commission's proposal to **prioritize research in infectious and parasitic diseases**, especially in view of the high frequency of travel of people from either side of the Mediterranean. In the context of the Mediterranean countries the participants would like to see collaborative research being done in several areas:

**Recommendations:**

- TB: Research to improve TB surveillance, operational research to improve the implementation of DOTS in the region, studies on drug-resistance. Molecular epidemiology studies to understand the impact and consequences of the new TB pandemic.
- HIV: Research to improve surveillance, (including drug resistance among HIV affected population). Research on preventive targeted-group oriented strategies, including provision of antiretroviral agents to pregnant women and counseling.
- Zoonosis and parasitic infections: Research can include studies on prevalence/incidence of diseases, immunopathogenesis, new (and low cost) methods of diagnosis control and treatment.
- Research on new strategies for the prevention of antibiotic resistance, including studies on surveillance and consumption patterns.
- Research on new orphan-drugs and vaccines.

**Topic: Consanguinity related diseases**

The high rate of consanguinity in the MPCs makes research on genetic and reproductive diseases essential to the area, as well as to Europe. Cross-cutting issues include education, genetic counseling, women's health and social patterns.

**Recommendations:**

- Identification of disease genes of public health relevance in the MPC
- Genetic predispositions for cancer and infectious diseases.
- Operational research on health care improvement in the perinatal period.
- Cost-effectiveness studies of screening for congenital disorders.
- Research on the social, economic and cultural determinants of the phenomenon.

Topic: Mental health

**Public health research must consider the increasing recognition of social and medical burden of mental health problems in the MED region including behavioral, emotional and stress-related disorders across the age-span.** Research should analyze specific approaches of prevention in this field and in different target groups.

**Recommendations:**

- Research on attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), especially among children, its factors and elements of prevention.
- Research on epidemiology of depression and its neurological, emotional and social aspects.
- Research on substance abuse, violence, suicide, post-traumatic stress disorders.
- Impact of chronic stress on chronic diseases.
- Social, cultural and gender differences of all those conditions.

Topic: Injury prevention and safety promotion

The high rate of injuries in the region calls for a strong research effort to strengthen the capacities for injury prevention and promotion of safety in the communities and various social and institutional settings.

**Recommendations:**

- Research on the regional patterns and determinants of injuries.
- Research on appropriate approaches to the prevention of injuries and the promotion of safety.
- Evaluation of community and organizational injury programmes.

Topic: Public health problems related to social inequalities

In the MPCs, as much as in the rest of the developed world, socioeconomic status and health concerns are strongly related. The comparably low GDP per capita of the MPCs (18.1% of the EU average in 2004 according to Commission data), further highlights the importance of this research to the Mediterranean countries. **Further research on the patterns and interactions of socio-economic determinants such as poverty, migration and gender, are essential in order to combat public health problems related to social inequalities.**

**Recommendations:**

- Strengthen the research in this area from European countries to MPCs.

- Research on the impact of socio-economic status on perinatal, infant and child mortality.
- Impact of social inequalities on diseases and risk-taking behavior.
- Impact of social inequalities in the access to, and the use of, health services.
- Occupational health and safety research.

**Topic: Health Systems Research**

Research aiming at strengthening and improving the quality of health services and systems. This will include research on the effectiveness of public health interventions. The modeling of awareness tools and health promotion is, as well, of high importance to the enhancement of the public health in the Mediterranean countries.

**Recommendations:**

- Research aiming to the improvement of Health Information Systems.
- The influence of health system decentralization on the population's health.
- Studies on effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of health interventions, services and policies.
- Improvement of equity in provision of health care, health promotion and participation as well as information of the civil society.
- Operational research on the provision of health care.

**Finally, the participants would like to stress that research in itself could not bring about a breakthrough in public health conditions in the region without improving the related research capacities and infrastructures.** In this regard we identify the following actions:

- Networking of research institutions, researchers and research teams fostering regional cooperation and public health capacity building.
- Promotion of mobility of scientists with special emphasis on early-stage researchers.
- Strong programs in post-graduate education and training for all health professions.
- Taking advantage of the new information technologies (diagnostic and communication devices).
- Fostering cooperation with networks of patient organizations in research, modeled on the European experience.

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