

## Press release

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# HAI Europe, ISDB, BEUC, AIM and MiEF respond to the EU patient health information initiative

**Brussels 29 September 2006** – Health Action International Europe (HAI-E), the International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB), the Association Internationale de la Mutualité (AIM), the Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs (BEUC), and the Medicines in Europe Forum (MiEF) have endorsed a joint declaration on the provision of relevant health information to citizens, to be presented on the occasion of the meeting of the European Commission Pharmaceutical Forum. The Pharmaceutical Forum, which is chaired jointly by *DG Health & Consumer Protection* and *DG Enterprise & Industry* and includes many industry representatives, has established a working group on information to patients.

**Considering that health information is a fundamental and necessary part of healthcare, HAI Europe, ISDB, BEUC, AIM and MiEF call for a clear distinction between information and advertising disguised as information. They warn of the inherent conflicts of interest of pharmaceutical companies which are unable to provide unbiased comparative information on available drug and non-drug treatment alternatives.**

The declaration supports dissemination of information which aims to meet the needs of patients and the public, and is independent, reliable, comparable and adapted to users. In addition, it includes many positive examples of information sources provided by health authorities, medical product agencies, healthcare assessment agencies, health care providers, health professionals, consumers organizations and independent patient groups.

Following the defeat of the Direct to Consumer Advertising (DTCA) initiative in 2003 by a large majority of MEPs, HAI Europe has witnessed the insidious creep of deliberate promotion of medical products to consumers, masquerading as patient information. We are aiming both to draw attention to the need for support for accurate, independent and relevant health information, and to combat scurrilous attempts to influence patients and consumers choice through advertising disguised as patient information, said Tim Reed, Director of HAI Europe.

The paper also suggests proposals for improvement, such as ensuring the transparency of medical products agencies to guarantee full public access to pre-market studies of drug safety and effectiveness, and pharmacovigilance data; requiring pharmaceutical companies to fulfil their obligations concerning packaging; developing and reinforcing sources of comparative, unbiased information on treatment choices; optimizing communication between patients and health professionals; directly including patients in post-market surveillance; ending the confusion of roles between pharmaceutical companies and other actors; full implementation and enforcement of the European regulation on drug promotion.

**HAI** – Health Action International (HAI) is an independent, global network of over 200 consumer, health, development and other public interest groups involved in health and pharmaceutical issues in 70 countries worldwide. HAI works to increase access to essential medicines and improve their rational use. HAI actively promotes a more rational use of drugs and believes that all drugs marketed should meet real medical needs, have therapeutic advantages, be acceptably safe and offer value for money. More info: [www.haiweb.org](http://www.haiweb.org)

**ISDB** – The International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB) is a world wide Network of bulletins and journals on drugs and therapeutics that are financially and intellectually independent of pharmaceutical industry. More info: [www.isdbweb.org](http://www.isdbweb.org)

**AIM** – The Association Internationale de la Mutualité (AIM) is a grouping of autonomous health insurance and social protection bodies operating according to the principles of solidarity and non-profit-making orientation. More info: [www.aim-mutual.org](http://www.aim-mutual.org)

**BEUC** – The European Consumers' Organisation is the Brussels based federation of 40 independent national consumer organisations from the EU, accession and EEA countries. More info: [www.beuc.org](http://www.beuc.org)

**MiEF** – The Medicines in Europe Forum, launched in March 2002, covers 12 European member states. It includes more than 70 member organizations representing the four key players on the health field, i.e. patients groups, family and consumer bodies, social security systems, and health professionals.

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