



A breath of fresh air:

New data on the most common and underestimated chronic disease in the EU -- respiratory allergies

25 November, Brussels: The statistics speak for themselves: 1 in every 2 Europeans will suffer from an allergy by 2015, but what's worse is that their chronic condition is very likely to be underdiagnosed and undertreated. This is the message of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Association (EFA) to the European Parliament yesterday during the launch of its new book on respiratory allergies. Allergies and asthma are the most common chronic diseases in Europe: 113 million people suffer from allergic rhinitis and 68 million from allergic asthma, and both chronic conditions are on a steady rise.

The crux of EFA's book is the wealth of information collected through a comprehensive survey sent to EFA member associations on the state of allergies across the EU. The President of EFA, Mrs Breda Flood introduced the book as "the first part of a 4 year allergy awareness project to create better public awareness of respiratory allergies and their unmet needs, and bring policy makers, the medical community and the public to treat these conditions as a major public health challenge." The results reveal the loopholes and inequalities in prevention, diagnosis and management of respiratory allergies. The book includes a Call to Action, asking governments and the EU to:

1. Increase the political recognition of respiratory allergy as a real and serious disease;
2. Promote national programmes on respiratory allergies;
3. Prioritise their prevention, management and control;
4. Promote training for healthcare professionals;
5. Align healthcare and reimbursement policies to support appropriate disease management;
6. Improve air quality.

The MEPs and Commission representative present warmly welcomed the release of the book offering information and comparative data collected across 18 EU countries. Ms Gardini (EPP, Italy) and host of the event, stressed the necessity of ensuring allergies have a place in the future Health for Growth Programme. Ms Nessa Childers (Irish, S&D) insisted on the importance of a smoke-free environment in all Member States and early action on respiratory allergies at the primary care level. Michael Hübel from the Commission said more research is needed in the field, and focus should also be made on health inequalities as a risk factor of chronic conditions.

The event was supported unanimously by the European allergy community and EFA partners, who called for a better understanding and management of respiratory allergies which create a heavy burden on the economy and the society. In fact asthma alone was calculated to cost €17.7 billion per year in Europe, and the loss of productivity at work due was estimated to cost €9.8 billion year in Europe, making allergies the most costly disease for our societies. The community also stressed the need for a 'one airway, one disease' approach in the diagnosis and therapeutic management of



respiratory allergies, as epidemiological studies have consistently shown that often allergic rhinitis and asthma co-exist in the same patient.

The Polish Presidency representative Boleslaw Samolinski stressed that healthy ageing depends on children's health. Therefore, it is crucial to develop new tools to improve the prevention, early detection and treatment of chronic respiratory diseases in children by using the "health in all policies" approach, especially across the health, education, environment, research and employment sectors. The Chair of the Council Working Party on Public Health also welcomed EFA's Calls to Action, whose recommendations are in line with the Council draft Conclusions on chronic respiratory diseases. The Conclusions will be adopted by the Health Council on 2 December, constituting a first positive step in the political recognition of respiratory allergies as a major health problem.

About EFA

EFA is a European network of patient organizations that was founded in 1991, prompted by the belief that an international organization formed by European patients associations that share the same aims would be a more effective way to serve the needs and safeguard the rights of patients and their careers.

www.efanet.org

For more information please contact:

Antje Fink-Wagner at +49 (0)171 761 6923

antje.finkwagner@efanet.org