Priorities of the Health Council (EPSCO) – Press Note

Minister for Health Chris Fearne outlined the priorities of the Maltese Presidency of the Council in the health sector at the EPSCO-Health Council which met today in Brussels. Mr Fearne provided a context to Malta’s initiatives during its Presidency in particular the prevalence of overweight children in countries across Europe.

The Minister for Health said that the Maltese Presidency holds the subject of health in high regard and is eager to provide a platform where through our collaborative efforts we can work together in synergy to further health across the EU.

During the Presidency Malta will be examining the findings, together with other Member States and the European Commission, of the mid-term evaluation report (2014-2020) on the EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity and identify those areas which merit further action.

Malta will also be preparing Draft Council Conclusions for negotiation, with the aim of determining actions to achieve the overarching goal of halting the rise in overweight and obese children and young people by 2020.

Mr Fearne said that the Maltese Presidency, with the support of the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity, of the Joint Research Council and of the World Health Organisation is drafting voluntary guidelines for the procurement of healthy food for consumption in schools.

The ultimate aim of this exercise is to encourage and instill healthy eating behaviours at an early stage in life.

In addition, The Maltese Presidency together with all Member States will jointly explore mechanisms of voluntary structured cooperation, and in doing so will seek to provide tangible benefits for both our patients and health professionals.

Two potential areas for voluntary structured cooperation have been identified and include: structured cooperation to improve access to innovative health technologies for Rare Diseases; and cooperation to address the EU health workforce challenges. Draft Council Conclusions will also be drafted for further negotiation in this respect.

The recent upsurge in HIV infections EU-wide requires immediate, concerted action. The Maltese Presidency, in collaboration with the European Commission and the ECDC, will bring together leading experts on prevention and control to discuss how Europe can improve its response to HIV and achieve the targets outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals, the actions agreed at the UN High-Level meeting on HIV/AIDS and those adopted in the Global Health Sector Strategy at the World Health Assembly.
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The Minister for Health also announced that Malta will be hosting a Ministerial Conference as part of its Presidency programme, on ‘Developing Medicines for Rare Diseases’, which will be held on the 21 March following the Informal Ministers’ Meeting on the 19th and 20th March.