## Innovation as a way of making health care systems resistant to crisis

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**Bad Hofgastein, 13 September 2013**– The European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) is to hold its 16th annual congress from 2 to 4 October 2013 on the subject “Resilient and innovative health care systems in Europe.” In advance of the event, the EHFG announced the updated programme (http://www.ehfg.org/de/program2013.html). Top policy makers have confirmed they would come to the leading health policy congress in Europe, among them, EU Commissioner of Health and Consumer Policy Tonio Borg, Austrian Minister of Health Alois Stöger and his German counterpart Daniel Bahr.

“Recent developments have shown that we have selected a late-breaking topic for this year’s congress”, says Prof Helmut Brand, President of the EHFG. “We are building on last year’s topic which focussed on health in an age of austerity by taking the discussion further. Recent struggles with the impact of the crisis have shown us the urgent need to rethink current policies and approaches.” The EHFG will thus explore the tense relationship between austerity policy and necessary innovations in health care systems and debate what can be learnt from the current crisis and how systems can react in a resilient and innovative way.

This year’s congress was no less than an attempt to square the circle, President Brand stresses: “In this age of economic crisis, poverty and psychological stresses, it is an enormously relevant task to make health care systems resistant to crisis while also finding room and financial resources for innovations.”

The EU Commission will be represented by Paola Testori Coggi, Director General of Health and Consumers (DG SANCO), Robert Madelin, Director General of Communications Networks, Content and Technologies (DG Connect) and Lieve Fransen, Director at the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, among others, and will use the congress to present its strategies on subjects such as “Investments in health” or “mHealth – mobile applications”.

Professor Brand intends to integrate the representatives of the trio of Presidencies of the Council of the European Union in the EHFG more strongly to ensure that the topics and proposals discussed in Gastein will actually be incorporated into European health policy. “Policy decisions in social and health policies touch the lives of every individual citizen very directly,” the EHFG President notes. Lithuania, which currently has the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, will be represented by its Minister of Health Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis while Greece, which is the next country to have the Presidency, will be represented by its Minister of Health Adonis Georgiades. Ireland, which held the EU presidency in the first six months of 2013 will be represented by the Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Health Fergal Lynch. Hungarian Minister of Health Miklós Szóska has also confirmed that he would come as have his counterparts from the Republic of Moldova, Andrei Usatii, and Taiwan, Wen-ta Chiu.

Additional high calibre participants include, among others, Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe; Uwe E. Reinhardt, Professor at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at the Princeton University; Marc Sprenger, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC); and European Members of Parliament Karin Kadenbach, Antonyia Parvanova, Angelika Werthmann and Amelia Andersdotter.

About 600 participants from 50 countries will take advantage again this year of the European Health Forum Gastein as a unique platform for an exchange of opinions among decision-makers, NGOs, patient advocates and providers of health care services as well as science and industry.

Plenary discussions will focus inter alia on the resilience of health care systems, the necessity of investing in health and the possibilities of implementing and financing innovations in the health care system in spite of difficult basic conditions. Further topics will be the role of mental health as an engine for driving a healthy economy, the innovative area of mHealth, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the implication of the EU-US free-trade zone for health systems.

Workshops will delve into the following topics, among others: better access to care; less discrimination in the healthcare system; patient-centred diabetes treatment; schizophrenia and social inclusion; the state of oncology therapy; economic stress tests for health care systems and hospital germs – an underestimated problem.

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