## EHFG 2013: SURVEY REVEALS SIZEABLE GAP BETWEEN CITIZENS´ DESIRE TO SELF CARE AND THEIR ACCESS THE MEANS TO DO

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*Europeans want to take greater control through self care. However, they meet major barriers to fully embracing the concept. This is revealed in the Self Care Perception Barometer, a survey presented by Epposi at the European Health Forum Gastein. The conference explores strategies to make European health systems more resilient and innovative.*

**Bad Hofgastein, 3 October 2013** - European citizens have an appetite to take greater control of their health and well being through self care. However, they face barriers to fully embracing self care, missing out on many of the personal, social and economic benefits. This was revealed in a survey examining detailed attitudes of European citizens to self care for the first time. The Self Care Perception Barometer was commissioned by Epposi, a Brussels-based independent, multi-stakeholder health think-tank, and surveyed the perception of almost 2,000 citizens in ten European countries. It examined perceptions towards self-medication, personal health maintenance and accessing the knowledge and skills required to practise self-care.

Launching the survey results at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG), Jacqueline Bowman-Busato, Executive Director of Epposi, said; “The survey showed a clear desire amongst respondents to use self care to take greater control of their health and well-being.” Ms Bowman-Busato continued; “This unmet need can and should be addressed; it is preventing the realisation of the individual, social and economic benefits of self care and its contribution to innovative and resilient health systems.”

“Resilient and Innovative Health Systems for Europe” is the slogan for this year's EHFG. More than 550 participants from some 45 countries are attending Europe's most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to exchange views on key issues affecting European health systems.

The Barometer revealed that almost 90 % of respondents believe that self care is a vital component of remaining healthy and managing their illnesses. Despite this, the majority of people still choose to visit their family doctor as their first step in dealing with health problems. Less than 20 % make lifestyle changes, with fewer still choosing to self-medicate. One major reason for the gap between the desire and practice is an individual lack of confidence. Although people would like to take responsibility for their own health, only one in seven people reported that they felt very confident to do so.

**Lack of information and communication**

Another reason was a lack of easily accessible, dependable sources of reliable information. Although many individuals look first to the family doctor for advice on how to self care, three-quarters of respondents say that many healthcare professionals lack the communication skills to help them. Around one in five people look to the internet as their initial source of information, almost twice the number that ask their pharmacist.

Ms Bowman-Busato pointed out that many of these barriers were relatively easy to overcome. “There are many simple steps that can transform the use of self care. Improving basic health literacy and providing quality information would be an excellent place to begin.” Ms. Bowman-Busato also cited financial barriers; “It is also important to ensure self care products and services are easily accessible and affordable; 25 % of those surveyed said they found the cost of self-care prohibitive. Governments should identify policies to encourage self care, especially in low income groups.” Such policies would deliver substantial benefits, in particular allowing individuals to remain active, contributing members of society.

**EHFG Press Office**Dr Birgit Kofler  
B&K Kommunikationsberatung GmbH  
Phone during the conference: +43 6432 85105  
Mobile: +43 676 636 89 30  
Phone: Vienna Office: +43 1 319 43 78 13  
E-mail: http://www.ehfg.org/typo3conf/ext/ml_links/Resources/Public/Icons/mailto.gif [press(at)ehfg.org](javascript:linkTo_UnCryptMailto('nbjmup+qsfttAfigh/psh');)