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Tackling the tackling

Special Interest Session:
Tackling health inequalities in England

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Tackling health inequalities in England.doc/ Thomas Kaltenbacher

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Dr. Isabel Oliver of the U.K. Department of Health presented the English government's consultation document entitled 'Tackling Health Inequalities: consultation on a plan for delivery' in an internationally attended special session of the European Health Forum Gastein. The aim of the session, as Dr. Oliver clearly stated at the beginning, was to gather views on the issue of Health Inequalities by the international, though mostly British audience.

The document

The cross-Government and cross-sector consultation document deals with the two national health inequalities targets as announced last February by the Secretary of State. Priority areas for action are named in the document as well as systems and processes how these priorities should be delivered. Among these priorities one finds targets such as child poverty, smoking, cancer and teenage pregnancy. A basket of indicators to support action on health inequalities will be designed to meet all users' needs and feedback is strongly requested.

Feedback

Clearly asked for in the document and by Dr. Oliver in the session feedback has and will be given widely, though mostly of a critical nature. Especially the issue on smoking has been addressed in the session by Andrew Haze from the European Public Health Department who misses the English government's commitment to the issue and is asking why tobacco advertisements have not been banned in England unlike in other European countries. From New Zealand it could be learned that with concentrating on a small number of targets these can be fulfilled more easily. Even though cigarettes in New Zealand are only around 2,50 (UK: 4,50) smoking has been dramatically reduced.

With the consultation document the English government aims at important targets but can they tackle the tackling?

Thomas Kaltenbacher