



Better Health for All - Promoting Gender Equity

18 October 2011 – A Roundtable of politicians, policy makers and a wide range of stakeholders with expertise in research, health policy and gender issues heard from the ENGENDER research team how to reduce inequalities in health by taking a more gender-sensitive approach to health policy, prevention, treatment and care.

ENGENDER, a DG Sanco funded project, is led by the Karolinska Institute of Sweden in partnership with nine associated organisations all of whom active in research, health and gender policy. The overall aim of ENGENDER is to increase awareness and knowledge for all stakeholders, including policy makers, politicians, researchers, health NGOs within and outside the health sector about effective policies and programmes to achieve gender equity in health.

Health is not only influenced by genetic or biological processes but also by socio-economic conditions, educational, cultural and environmental factors. In fact many of the social determinants of health such as lack of income, inappropriate housing, an unsafe workplace lie outside the health sector.

Setting the scene for the meeting, **Ms Edite Estrela MEP**, Rapporteur for the European Parliament on Health Inequalities, quoted from her parliamentary report: *"Inequalities experienced in earlier life in access to education, employment and healthcare as well as those based on gender and cultural background can have a critical bearing on the health status of people throughout their lives. The combination of poverty with other vulnerabilities such as childhood or old age, disability or minority background further increases health risks and vice-versa, ill health can lead to poverty and/or social exclusion."*

Experts from the ENGENDER project highlighted the need for increased knowledge about effective policies and actions to improve gender equity. *"Health systems need to become more aware of the specific health needs of men and women and apply a gender-sensitive approach to prevention, treatment and care for both sexes,"* said **Peggy Maguire, Director General of the European Institute of Women's Health** and an associate project partner.

Women appear to have a biological advantage over men, they live on average 6 years longer, however, their healthy life expectancy is only around 18 months more. Women's later years are all too often burdened by chronic illness, disability and loss of independent living.

*"In men poor lifestyles and preventable risk factors account for a high proportion of morbidity and premature death", stated **Ian Banks, President of the European Men's Health Forum** and also an associate partner. "Yet these lifestyle choices again have to be seen in the context of economic, social and environmental, educational and cultural factors. The good news is that these can be changed. Men need to learn to invest more in their own health."*

One of the key objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy is to increase the healthy life expectancy of Europeans by 2 years. *"Reducing inequalities in health is an important move to increase the number of years lived in good health for women and men; and especially of those belonging to the socio-economic disadvantaged or vulnerable groups,"* concluded **Sean Kelly, MEP from Ireland**. *"As a former educator, I believe we have to create a health-enhancing environment and tackle the 'male/female stereotype' at school before behavioural patterns have become fixed. It is important to offer timely opportunities for prevention, early diagnosis and interventions to avoid much chronic disability and enable us all to live healthy long lives."*

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