

BRUSSELS, 13 FEBRUARY 2018

To: Health Ministers of the WHO European Region outside EU-28

Open letter

Call to take up decisive action for clean air in the European Region by multiplying health sector engagement

Dear Minister,

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is a leading European not-for-profit organisation working for better health through a healthy environment. Protecting people's health from air pollution, especially that of vulnerable groups such as children or those already suffering from disease, has been a priority of our 75 member organisation's alliance since HEAL's founding fifteen years ago [1].

We would like to express our deep concern that despite political commitments, air pollution continues to be the largest single environmental health risk in the European Region, leading to nearly 430,000 early deaths in its 41 countries [2], and in most countries of the WHO European region, air quality is a lot poorer than what the World Health Organization (WHO) considers safe [3]. The health impacts of air pollution are completely unacceptable because they are easily preventable.

HEAL would like to urge you as health minister to give greater priority to preventing disease and ill-health from air pollution in your national efforts. We invite you to set up a high-level inter-ministerial working group that will consider air quality benefits or threats for all relevant laws, strategies and measures; to adopt a roadmap for aligning national air standards to WHO's; or to get involved in your country's activities to tackle climate change and implement the Paris Climate Agreement, promoting those measures that will bring the greatest benefit to health, air quality and the climate.

In recent years, tackling air pollution has received greater attention in the health sector.

In 2015, the World Health Assembly adopted the first ever resolution on this issue, urging member states to redouble their efforts to identify, address, and prevent health effects of air pollution; to enable health systems to take a leading role; to facilitate research and improve databases and surveillance; as well as to develop inter-sectoral collaboration [4]. The recently adopted Ostrava Declaration also includes health ministers' commitment for actions to meet the World Health Organization's air quality guidelines [5]. In addition, a recent Lancet report on pollution and health highlighted the huge health impacts from pollution globally [6].

We invite you to bring this and other evidence on health effects of air pollution into the WHO Action Plans for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), where this global health threat is largely absent at present [7].

HEAL looks forward to working with you to increase public awareness and health engagement in view of the forthcoming WHO First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health 30 October – 1 November 2018 and

the WHO DG report on Health, Environment and Climate Change, endorsed by the February WHO Executive Board [8].

You can find further information on air pollution and health as well as concrete policy recommendations in the attached document outlining HEAL's demands for clean air in the European Region which will be available in additional languages in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,



Genon K. Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

[1] HEAL members working for clean air include the European Federation for Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA), the European Respiratory Society (ERS), the European Lung Foundation (ELF), Association Internationale de la Mutualite (AIM) and Belgian national members, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), Leefmilieu, Inter-Environnement Wallonie, International Society of Doctors for the environment (ISDE) and ISDE Austria, Sweden and Italy, International Network on Children's Health, Environment and Safety (INCHES), and others. For more information on HEAL's activities see chapter 10..5: The role of civil society and organisations by M. van den Bosch, C. E. Falvo, G. Jensen, J. Karliner, R. Stancliffe in: Oxford Textbook of Nature and Public Health. The role of nature in improving the health of a population, Jan. 2018: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/oxford-textbook-of-nature-and-public-health-9780198725916?cc=it&lang=en#>

[2] See European Environment Agency (EEA), air quality in Europe 2017: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/improving-air-quality-in-european>

[3] WHO ambient air quality guidelines: http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/outdoorair_aqg/en/

[4] <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/news/news/2015/05/air-quality-and-health-resolution-adopted-at-the-sixty-eighth-world-health-assembly>

[5] <http://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/events/2017/06/sixth-ministerial-conference-on-environment-and-health/read-more>

[6] <http://gahp.net/>
[http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/18.10.2017 - eu backgrounder.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/18.10.2017_-_eu_backgrounder.pdf)

[7] http://www.who.int/nmh/events/ncd_action_plan/en/

[8] http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB142/B142_12-en.pdf

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is a leading European not-for-profit organization addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union. With the support of its over 70 member organizations, which represent health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts, HEAL brings independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making processes. Members include international and Europe-wide organisations as well as national and local groups.