

Editorial

This year has kept European Union leaders busy with the financial crisis and setting the EU back on an economic recovery path. Working closely with the European institutions, HEAL had regular opportunities to stress that economic growth starts with a healthy population.

We did this by showcasing how environmental action results in better health and by spotlighting the win-win scenarios that exist for making Europe more sustainable while bringing down rates of cancer, heart disease, obesity, diabetes or asthma.

This year, there was evidence of a growing recognition among EU and international policy makers that changes in environment policy can create better health. Here are some examples:

- Health Commissioner John Dalli told the UN High-level Meeting on Non-communicable Diseases that environmental factors were part of the approach needed to prevent cancer and other chronic disease. The European Parliament sent a similar message.
- The World Health Organization's Asturias Declaration recognised that cancer control programmes should address environmental and occupational exposures.

There has also been evidence of growing support for the environmental approach to better health within the wider community:

- UK medical and military personnel have joined forces to protect public health and human development with a call for strong targets to tackle climate change.
- Not-for-profit health insurers of the International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies (AIM) have become involved in environmental health prevention through a strategic partnership with HEAL.



- National and EU media have featured more health stories addressing the role of chemicals in current epidemics, the risks to health from fracking, and chemical-related patients' stories, especially in France.

We still have a long way to go until politicians fully recognise the health economic argument and put environmental prevention at the heart of their decision-making ...

Growing evidence exists on how far-reaching the harm to health is from exposure to chemicals and climate change; but science also provides the corresponding good news that lives could be saved, healthcare budgets slashed and, most importantly, well-being and quality of life improved by moving towards a low carbon, health promoting environment that is sustainable for future generations.

Gradually, working with HEAL member organisations, partners, supporters and funders, we are getting these messages across and we look forward to our continued work with them and with European citizens on environmental health protection.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Genon', written over a white background.

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