

Political priorities of President Ursula von der Leyen and
Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner-designate for Health

HEAL questions for European Parliament hearings

Legislature 2019-2024

Your [mission letter](#) mentions:

- Cross-cutting priorities
 - Support Member States in constantly improving the quality and sustainability of their health systems
 - Play an important role in delivering on the European Green Deal
- Lead on
 - The farm to fork strategy for sustainable food, covering every step in the food chain from production to consumption
 - Putting forward Von der Leyen Commission's Beating cancer plan, starting with cancer prevention
 - Reducing dependency on pesticides, notably by stimulating non-chemical alternatives
 - Protecting citizens from exposure to endocrine disruptors

QUESTIONS

In order to deliver on sustainability of health systems across Member States and delivering on the European Green Deal:

Zero-pollution, zero victim from pollution

President-elect von der Leyen committed to a cross-cutting zero-pollution strategy that will: “protect citizens’ health from environmental degradation and pollution, address air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, industrial emissions, pesticides and endocrine disruptors”. Health groups think that the primary focus of the zero-pollution strategy should be on pollution prevention and the emphasis of the precautionary and polluter-pays principles.

Question 1 - How will you contribute to the development and implementation of this strategy, and what kind of actions will you include to protect especially those most vulnerable to the impact of

pollution, such as pregnant women, children, those already sick, or the poor? How will you address the delay between exposure to pollution and the onset of disease and ill-health, which can happen decades after the exposure? What do you propose to address the problem of accumulation of pollution and persistency of substances?

Question 2 - What do you propose for ending environmentally harmful subsidies and ensuring compensations for patients that are victims of exposure to hazardous substances, either in the zero-pollution strategy or in other policy-measures?

More resources: HEAL briefing on a non-toxic strategy ([EN](#), [FR](#), [NL](#)); HEAL Fossil Fuel Subsidies & Health report ([EN](#), [DE](#), [PL](#))

In order to deliver on the plan to beat cancer:

A healthy planet for healthy people

Harmful chemicals are now ubiquitous in the environment but preventing environmental pollution can save lives and reduce the toll of diseases. European governments have committed to an 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP). One of the priority objectives of the current 7th EAP expiring in 2020 is to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being.

Question 1 - The EU's Environmental Action Programmes have been essential to define and guide the environmental strategies and measures. In the 8th EAP, what will be your main policy proposals to ensure that a zero-pollution strategy really reduces the toll of diseases?

Healthy, renewable and efficient energy

Burning coal for energy production is the most polluting and most health-harming form of power generation, leading to high health costs. Europe is still a major global producer and consumer of lignite (brown coal), despite all objectives for climate mitigation.

Question 1 - How will you contribute to providing Europeans with healthy energy, and put an end to Europe's addiction to coal?

Question 2 - What will you do to speed up action in member states to end subsidies to coal?

Question 3 - How will you work on decarbonising the power sector in EU neighbouring states, especially the Western Balkans, where coal power generation is the dominant energy source, and where heavy Chinese investment is taking place for more coal?

Question 4 - Healthy Buildings: How will you tackle energy poverty in Europe and what kind of instruments and financial incentives will you propose so that energy efficiency renovations start with those buildings where vulnerable groups spend their time?

More resources: HEAL [campaign on healthy energy](#); Healthy Energy briefing ([EN](#), [DE](#), [PL](#), [CZ](#)); Lignite briefing ([EN](#), [TK](#), [DE](#)); Chronic Coal report ([EN](#), [SB](#), [RO](#))

In order to reduce dependency on pesticides:

Stop pesticides to promote health

Pesticides in our food, water and air can harm children's healthy development, disrupt our hormonal systems, and increase the risk of cancer and infertility. As part of a recent European Citizens' Initiative, 1.3 million Europeans asked for mandatory pesticide reduction targets for the EU and its Member States. In July this year, the European Food Safety Authority recommended the non-renewal of chlorpyrifos-ethyl and -methyl, a brain harming pesticide found in EU fruits. We welcome the Commission's announcement of its intention to support a non-renewal of those two active substances.

Question 1 - In order to keep poisonous pesticides out of our food and to protect our health, which immediate measures will you take in order to improve the implementation of the Plant Protection Products Regulation, at both levels of evaluation and approval to guarantee that the health and environment protection stated objectives are effectively achieved?

More resources: HEAL chlorpyrifos fact sheet (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [ES](#)). Petition to ban chlorpyrifos (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#))

In order to protect citizens from exposure to endocrine disruptors:

EDC-Free future

Everyday exposure to low-doses of endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) is linked to numerous health disorders, including hormonal cancers, obesity, diabetes, infertility or learning disabilities. Conservative estimates of the burden of diseases linked to EDCs in Europe amount to at least 163 billion euros every year. Yet, existing European regulations on endocrine disruptors are not living up to this health emergency: identification criteria only exist for known and presumed EDCs under the biocides and pesticides legislations, the REACH system for identification of EDCs is very slow, does not address groups of similar substances (e.g. only bisphenol A in the bisphenol group), and EDC identification under REACH does not result in automatic bans under other legislations (e.g. bisphenol A is identified as an EDC under REACH but is tolerated in food contact materials). In June of this year, Member States asked the Commission to swiftly present an updated EDC strategy and fix regulatory gaps, which is still awaited and needs to address all the issues mentioned above.

Question 1 - As part of the new European strategy on EDCs promised by the Commission, which measures will you take to achieve the goal to minimise Europeans' exposure to hormone disruptors?

Question 2 - In particular what are your proposals to address all suspected, presumed and known endocrine disruptors we are exposed to every day and to speed up their regulation across sectors and consumer products?

More resources: EDC Free website (available in [EN](#) – [DE](#) – [NL](#) – [SE](#) – [DK](#) – [ES](#) – [FR](#)); HEAL [infographic on why low dose exposure matters](#) (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [PT](#), [ES](#), [NL](#))

Farm to fork strategy:

Titanium dioxide (TiO₂)

Titanium dioxide is a suspected carcinogen used in numerous consumer products from paints to sunscreens, cosmetics and as a food additive. A number of uncertainties persists as to the long-term toxicity of the substance for human health with a solid body of evidence from [independent scientific studies](#) pointing to serious irreversible effects such as cancer. In this context, the French government - backed up by the expertise of its agency on health and safety [ANSES](#) - recently introduced a [ban](#) of titanium dioxide for use as a food additive as of January 2020. It also appears that the additive brings [no nutritional values](#) to food and is only added for aesthetic purposes, while it is not problematic for [industry](#) to remove it from products. The European Commission, EFSA and other governments are [currently](#) discussing whether to abrogate this measure, to uphold it or to extend it at the European level - in a context of important pressure from the [titanium dioxide industry lobby groups](#) in order to undermine the French precautionary measure as well as European discussions on the classification of the substance under the regulation on classification, labelling and packaging (CLP).

Question 1 - Considering the solid body of independent scientific evidence about the irreversible and long-term health effects of titanium dioxide, will you commit to a precautionary approach to the substance and support the French suspension of its food additive form in order to put health protection before industry interests?

More resources: HEAL and NGOs calling for [support to the French ban](#) by EU policy-makers, joint NGOs [concerns](#) to ECHA

Halting chemicals in food contact materials from putting our health at risk

Nobody should have to worry about toxic substances moving from packaging into our food. Yet because of current loopholes in the European legislation on food contact materials, the objective to provide a high level of protection for health is not fulfilled. Consumer testing routinely find toxic substances in food packaging (e.g. [fluorinated](#) compounds in pizza boxes made of recycled paper, suspected [carcinogens](#) in disposable cups and straws) and it is estimated that plastic food packaging alone contains at least [63 chemicals](#) toxic for our health.

Numerous chemicals involved in the processing and packaging of our food are not tested for toxicity; chemicals identified as substances of very high concern (SVHCs) such as bisphenol A are tolerated in food contact materials, and endocrine disruption is not routinely assessed. Finally, only 5 out of the 17 types of existing food contact materials are regulated at the European level.

Question 1 - Preliminary results of the current evaluation of the food contact materials legislation reveal significant loopholes that put the health of Europeans at risk. What are your proposals to remedy this situation, in particular to ensure that all materials used in the processing and packaging of our food are regulated at the European level, and that all chemicals involved are tested for health hazard such as endocrine disruption?

More resources: [HEAL briefing](#) on chemicals in food contact materials ([summary](#))

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 70 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.