



Brussels, 1 October 2021

To: Health Ministers of the EU-27

Call for the Health Ministry to get engaged on clean air and support evidence-based air quality standards

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 90-member organisation's alliance since HEAL's founding in 2003. We are contacting you with a major opportunity to protect people's health in the EU through measures on air pollution, the largest environmental threat to human health.

Air pollution is the second leading cause of death from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) after tobacco smoking, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Recent studies point especially to the vulnerability of children, where air pollution exposure in early life can have lifelong consequences to health.¹ According to WHO, air pollution leads to 7 million premature deaths worldwide each year and an estimated 400,000 from ambient air pollution in the European Union.

Last week, WHO, after a systematic review of the science, published its new [Global Air Quality Guidelines](#)², presenting new science-based recommendations for concentrations of the major air pollutants.

These new recommendations now suggest lower values for the main pollutants, most notably for particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), which causes the greatest health burden in the EU, for which a new annual concentration of 5 µg/m³ is now recommended (the EU's annual standard is 25µg/m³). For nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which has come under intense scrutiny in discussions on road transport and inner-city driving bans, a new annual concentration of 10 µg/m³ is now recommended (from previously 40 µg/m³).

At EU level, the **revision of the EU's Ambient Air Quality Directive**, which sets clean air standards, is foreseen for autumn 2022. In this crucial update for public health, any statement from your side calling for **full alignment** with new WHO recommendations would be instrumental in strengthening European's health and preventing disease.

We invite you to assure that the voice of the nation's highest health body joins deliberations around Europe's most common environmental health risk, air pollution. A greater engagement on clean air would also mean following through with the commitments included in the WHO European Region 2018 Ostrava Declaration, in which health ministers made a pledge of actions to meet the World Health Organization's air quality guidelines.³

¹ <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/news/news/2019/3/noncommunicable-diseases-and-air-pollution>

² <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/345329/9789240034228-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

³ <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/news/news/2019/12/achieving-sustainable-and-healthy-environments-for-all-celebrating-30-years-of-the-european-environment-and-health-process>

HEAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

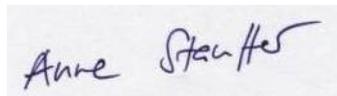
In the context of a pandemic of unprecedented nature, today's times call for a determined focus on health protection and the prevention of disease.

We invite you to demonstrate your commitment to protecting people's health from environmental threats by:

- Issuing a public statement expressing support for health-based air quality standards; thus, asking for your national government to support full alignment with WHO air quality recommendations for major pollutants and the latest science.
- Contributing health expertise for the formulation of the position of your country for the revision of the EU's ambient air quality directive, starting 2021/22, which will be led by Environment Ministers.
- Adopting Council Conclusions, as a demonstration of a shared understanding among EU health ministers on the need to tackle air pollution (Environment Ministers adopted Conclusions on [Air Quality Improvements](#) in 2020).

In the attached one-pager we have compiled a brief Q&A containing some key information on air pollution and health in the EU, as well as concrete policy recommendations.

Yours sincerely,



Anne Stauffer
Deputy Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

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 90 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.

HEAL's EU Transparency Register Number: 00723343929-96