

19 October 2026

To: EU Commission President von der Leyen

Cc : Executive Vice-Presidents, Commissioners

European Commission work programme 2027

A health reset to uphold health protection from environment and climate threats

Dear President von der Leyen,

Tomorrow, you are set to adopt the Commission's work programme for the year 2027.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is an alliance of over 70 member organisations working for better health through a healthier environment. We represent health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, doctors, nurses, cancer and asthma groups, citizens, women's and youth groups, environmental NGOs, scientists, and public health institutes.

HEAL calls on you to reset this Commission for preventing disease and health cost in next year's work programme, by withdrawing the Food and Feed Safety Omnibus proposal and refraining from proposing any further environmental and climate simplification proposals.

We have been voicing our concern that the simplification proposals in the area of environment put forward under your leadership will result in a weakening of key protection provisions, especially when it comes to chemicals and pesticides pollution. However, from your recent statements we gather that you seem to be planning to double down on simplification instead of changing course, by inter alia urging EU member states to end "gold-plating" (that is the setting of additional protection requirements).

We consider that the urgent issue for the EU's environmental and climate regulatory framework is not "simplification" but rather better implementation and enforcement, enabled by adequate funding through the next EU budget.

Such a focus would respect the EU's 8th Environment Action Programme as well as the 2023 World Health Organization Budapest Declaration on environment and health.

Further deregulating the existing legislative framework will result in additional suffering for people and increased health cost. This burden will inevitably fall more heavily on the most vulnerable in society, including children, people living with disease and people experiencing socio-economic health inequalities.

A one-sided focus on business cost, negating the burden of disease

Europeans' health is impacted like never before from climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, leading to a significant burden of disease. In the case of chemicals pollution, the existing cost assessments are but the tip of the iceberg, with new incoming evidence e.g. from the EU EXPOSOME project.

However, in current simplification debates, there is a one-sided focus on *reducing administrative burden or heavy burden* on businesses, while these health cost are negated.

For example, pesticides pollution is linked to a number of diseases – this includes childhood cancers, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and Parkinson's disease, to name a few. It is estimated that in 2017 alone, the societal costs – including health costs – directly attributable to pesticides pollution were approximately €2.3 billion.

Environmental pollution also plays a leading role in the development and aggravation of heart attacks and strokes, as almost 20% of deaths from cardiovascular disease are due to a polluted environment. Last but not least, the combination of heat and air pollution increases the rate of premature death for patients with cardiovascular and respiratory disease in cities.

These cost considerations need to urgently be recognised in simplification considerations.

People's health and a clean environment at the centre of stronger implementation

[An EU Commission own communication](#) highlights that the lack of implementation and enforcement of EU environmental laws heavily impacts the EU economy, leading to costs of at least €180 billion annually.

Preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment as well as protecting human health are enshrined in the EU treaties as objectives of the Union's environmental policy. Preventive action should be taken, environmental damage should as a priority continue to be rectified at source and the polluter should pay.

The European Commission needs to play its unique role as guardian of the treaties in ensuring that EU laws prioritise the public interest – that is the protection of people's and planetary health. HEAL considers that a focus on reducing administrative cost and burden to businesses is a narrow perspective, disregarding the significant cost to people's health (including impacts to vulnerable groups), societies and the natural environment from pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss.

When presenting the European Commission work programme 2027, HEAL counts on you to protect the most vulnerable groups – who are most at risk from pollution – and refrain from committing to any proposal that would increase the burden of disease from pollution, reduce accountability, and undermine transparency.

Regards,
Genon K. Jensen (she/her)
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

Annex

People's health is threatened like never before from climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this triple crisis is responsible for almost 20% of all deaths in the European region. Everyone's health in the EU is at risk, but some are more vulnerable than others, including children, pregnant women, the elderly, those already sick or those facing socio-economic health inequalities. 85% of respondents to the 2025 Eurobarometer consider climate change a serious problem for the world, while a growing share of Europeans (38%) report feeling personally exposed to environmental and climate-related risks.

With more than two out of five deaths, cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in the European Union. [Pollution plays a leading role in the development and aggravation of heart attacks and strokes](#), and almost 20% of deaths from cardiovascular disease are due to a polluted environment. More frequent and more severe heatwaves exacerbate the already high burden of disease, from the combination of heat and air pollution.

Europeans are deeply worried about the health impacts of chemicals pollution. An estimated [23,000](#) sites in Europe are contaminated by PFAS, and [12.5 million](#) Europeans live in communities where drinking water is polluted with these chemicals. A continuously growing body of scientific evidence links PFAS exposure to an increased risk of serious health impacts, including kidney and testicular cancer, liver disease, higher cholesterol levels, cardiovascular complications, decreased immune response, thyroid disease, hormone disruption, decreased fertility, and maternal and neonatal complications. [A 2026 report from the European Commission](#) estimates the total societal costs of PFAS pollution — including health and remediation — at nearly €440 billion by 2050 if no restriction measures are taken. This figure covers only the health costs related to already-regulated PFAS (PFOA, PFOS, PFHxS and PFNA), meaning the real costs of all PFAS pollution are likely significantly higher. The report also estimates that a full phase-out of PFAS would reduce health costs from approximately €39.5 billion per year in 2024 to around €0.5 billion per year by 2040.

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We are the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how our environment affects health in the European Union and beyond. Supported by over 70 member organisations, HEAL brings independent and expert scientific evidence from the health community to European and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention strategies. HEAL'S EU Transparency Register Number: 00723343929-96

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