



Press release

AER regions tackle alcohol related harm

Barcelona, Catalunya (E), 12 May 2010

Recognising the problem that alcohol abuse represents for our society, the Assembly of European Regions (AER) has organised a conference in Barcelona, together with the Department of Health of the Government of Catalonia (E), to discuss current regional projects and activities. The main purpose of the event was to emphasise the negative impact of alcohol and to present regions with policies and actions they can implement to prevent harm.

The conference stressed both the economic impact of alcohol-related harm on Europe and its social cost. Alcohol costs about 125 billion EUR per year; this includes expenses on health services, police and judicial systems, lost working hours and damage to property. Alcohol accounts for 1 in 4 deaths among young men and 1 in 10 deaths among young women. 1 in 4 road accidents involve alcohol. 1 in 4 young people binge drink - as opposed to 1 in 5 adults. The question is: what can regions do to prevent all this?

In the words of **Constantin Ostaficiuc**, President of AER's Social Policy and Public Health Committee and of Timis County Council (RO): *"These figures are frightening! A recent Eurobarometer study showed that over 90% of citizens support policy action to prevent alcohol related harm among young people. This gives us, regions, not only the legitimacy, but also the duty, to act."*

"In a Europe without borders, it is time, then, to act together, to form strategic alliances and partnerships and to promote the inclusion of health in all regional policies. This conference offered us a unique opportunity to share knowledge, best practices and experiences which will help us to tackle the complex phenomena of alcohol", stated **Marina Geli**, Regional Minister of Health of the Generalitat de Catalonia.

One of the good practice examples presented was the 'Beveu Menys' ('Drink Less') Programme implemented by the Government of Catalonia. Its main goals have been to integrate health promotion interventions for harmful alcohol consumption into primary health care professionals' daily clinical work and to put alcohol consumption on the public health agenda. In order to achieve its objectives, Catalonia has developed training and set up contractual incentives, as well as a network of referent professionals from primary health care and specialized centres.

The event concluded with a debate, which highlighted the importance of strategic alliances and of exchanging experiences at European regional level in order to promote profound changes in this field.

*The **Assembly of European Regions (AER – aer.eu)** is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.*

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