

The framework

The advantages of trans-national partnerships are obvious: Social security systems which historically have come into being independently of one another and in their own economic contexts face similar problems and challenges. Although the national health systems show significant differences as regards their organisation and funding, they face similar difficulties, such as an ageing population and all its concomitant consequences, medical and technical progress or the dominance and market strength of service-providers operating both Europe-wide and worldwide (such as the pharmaceuticals industry). Over and above this, the completion of the European Single Market, the common currency and the forthcoming enlargement of the EU to the East create a growing need for cooperation between the different social health insurance systems in Europe.

Against this background, the "European Social Health Insurance Forum" was established in 1994 as a trans-national network of health insurance organisations with similar systems, defending shared basic principles such as solidarity and contributory funding. The aim of the European Forum is for the interests of the citizens protected by social health insurance to be taken into full consideration in the political decision-making processes at national and European level according to the subsidiarity principle and a consensus-centred approach.

Goal and tasks

The European Social Health Insurance Forum pursues the goal of promoting and strengthening solidarity-based health insurance systems by actively supporting the process of integration and convergence for social policy in Europe. This also corresponds with the self-perception and the so-

cial policy mandate of the members of the European Forum to defend the interests of insured parties and patients at European level.

The members of the European Forum regard themselves as the champions of social health insurance which protects the large majority of the population. They are thus concerned to guarantee an efficient supply of high-quality healthcare services in the interest of the insured parties.

A further goal of the European Forum is to ensure that the interests of social health insurance are fully accommodated in the political decision-making processes at national and European level on the basis of the subsidiarity principle.

The task of the European Social Health Insurance Forum is to discuss European questions, interests and approaches that are of joint interest, and where appropriate to coordinate them trans-nationally. The focus is on gaining more recognition and political attention for the interests of citizens protected by social health insurance, both at national and at European level.

Activities and projects

The members of the European Social Health Insurance Forum form a stable network with condensed expert know-how and good institutional relationships. Under rotating national presidencies, they come together in regular plenary meetings and in special working group meetings in order to

- exchange information and experience on European matters and trends related to social health insurance, and
- to prepare and implement suitable measures and activities at European and national level regarding Community initia-

tives and measures (for example by issuing joint statements).

The working groups set up by the plenary meetings actively follow European trends.

The Pharmaceutical Policy Cooperation working group "**Medicine Evaluation Committee (MEDEV)**" was formed in 1998 as a standing working group. Its members are the drug experts and pharmacologists of the national social health insurance organisations and it pursues the following goals in particular:

- Timely provision of information and analyses of national trends, as well as developments in European policy and law in the field of pharmaceutical policy with regard to their impact on national health insurance systems
- Evaluation of new drugs, e.g. with regard to their therapeutic value, taking into consideration the pharmacoeconomic aspects
- Cost-benefit analyses and international country/system/price analyses
- Providing the necessary counterweight to the commercial interests of the European-wide pharmaceutical industry
- Active participation in the Community dialogue and decision-making process in the field of drugs.

Acting on this foundation, in recent years the European Forum has for instance taken up joint positions on various initiatives from the EU Institutions in the single market for pharmaceuticals, as well as on the approval and evaluation of medicines.

Furthermore, the plenary of the European Forum has established a working group in which the national experts are dealing with the "**Impact of European economic and competition law on social health insurance**" and the corresponding case law of the European Court of Justice.

The member organisations

The members of the European Social Health Insurance Forum are currently 14 national liaison agencies, associations and institutions for social health insurance from six European countries, namely from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The French *Caisse Nationale d'Assurance-Maladie des travailleurs – sécurité sociale* and the Belgian *Collège Intermutualiste National* are preparing for membership. Close contacts have been established with the International Social Security Association (ISSA), the European Social Insurance Partners (ESIP) and the Association Internationale de la Mutualité (AIM).

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