

A EUROPEAN
NETWORK OF
NONGOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS FOR
ACTION ON ALCOHOL



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Regional Office for Europe
COPENHAGEN

TARGET 17

TOBACCO, ALCOHOL AND PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS

By the year 2000, the health-damaging consumption of dependence-producing substances such as alcohol, tobacco and psychoactive drugs should have been significantly reduced in all Member States.

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Report on a WHO Meeting

Padua, Italy
28-30 November 1994

ABSTRACT

The success of the WHO European Alcohol Action Plan depends on the commitment and active participation of international organizations, Member States and governmental and nongovernmental agencies at national and local levels. In particular, a network of alcohol and health advocacy groups is needed to support nongovernmental action at local, national and international levels in line with the Action Plan. A meeting was organized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe as a first step in creating such a network. Representatives from nongovernmental organizations in the field of alcohol use attended. The participants agreed that existing networks and umbrella bodies should be brought together and used for this purpose. They discussed effective means of communication and adopted a timetable of coordinated action in support of the Plan. They would also work towards strengthening nongovernmental organizations' input to the WHO Conference on Health, Society and Alcohol in Paris in 1995.

Keywords

ALCOHOLISM – prevention and control
NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

The meeting on a European network of Nongovernmental Organizations for Action on Alcohol was organized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe with the support of the Regione del Veneto. It was attended by representatives of national or European-wide nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Annex 1 contains the list of participants. The meeting was chaired by Professor R. Naccarato and Mr E. Appleby served as Rapporteur.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- to explore the feasibility of establishing a European network of nongovernmental organizations for action on alcohol to support the European Alcohol Action Plan (EAAP);
- to prepare a work plan and identify methods of communication for such a network; and
- to exchange the experiences of different nongovernmental alcohol action organizations in advocating and implementing the EAAP.

Participants were welcomed by Mr G.C. Niero and Mr E. Vesce on behalf of the Veneto Region, by Dr V. Patussi on behalf of the Italian NGOs, by Dr F. Marcomini on behalf of the Healthy Cities project, and by Professor R. Naccarato on behalf on the Società Italiana di Alcologia.

Dr P. Anderson, WHO Regional Office for Europe, thanked the Veneto Region for its support, as well as the City and University of Padua and the Società Italiana di Alcologia for their help in organizing the meeting. He emphasized the need for action, pointing to the trend towards liberalization and deregulation that was leading to increases in alcohol-related harm in many parts of Europe. At the same time, in central and eastern Europe the rapid social and economic changes taking place had resulted in a public health disaster with a large number of preventable deaths, many alcohol-related. However, he also gave examples of successful collaborative work that had taken place in pursuit of the EAAP and emphasized that this

work should not be underestimated. Against this background he hoped that the meeting would achieve three specific goals:

- a clear proposal and plan for a network which could share existing knowledge and coordinate activities;
- a broadening of the network to include nonspecialist partners such as transport, consumer, women's and environmental organizations;
- a plan for the effective involvement of NGOs in the ministerial Conference on Health, Society and Alcohol, to be held in Paris in December 1995.

DISCUSSION

Some alcohol and action NGOs in Europe

Various NGOs gave a brief presentation on their aims and work. The Association Nationale de Prévention de l'Alcolisme (ANPA), formed in 1872, works in all regions of France to prevent alcohol-related problems. It takes a population approach, based on moderation, and seeks to maintain a balance between control, education and care. It has a comprehensive library and information service and produces the journal *Alcool et santé*.

The International Drivers' Behaviour Research Association (IDBRA), France, is dedicated to upgrading the quality of policy-making in relation to drinking and driving. It operates through meetings focused on producing practical conclusions. It aims to ensure that policies are applied and enforced adequately. Among its achievements has been the development tools for the assessment of risk.

Deutsche Hauptstelle Gegen Die Suchtgefahren (DHS) (German Council on Addiction Problems) is an umbrella organization representing associations of specialists in addiction in Germany. Its key activities include further development of professional standards in training and in treatment services and linking specialist medical

services with other nonspecialist interventions. It produces the *Sucht* journal and yearbook.

The Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC), Poland, is part of a network of information centres that take a comprehensive approach to drug and alcohol use. It works at a national level (e.g. advising on legislation) and at local and institutional levels (e.g. workplace, schools, hospitals). Its current emphasis is on rigorously evaluating prevention programmes.

EUROCARE was launched in 1990 and grew out of concern at the possible effects of legislation within the European Union (EU) on alcohol control policy. It comprises a coalition of voluntary and nongovernmental organizations within the EU. Since its inception it has held annual meetings and has received EU funding for a project in Italy and Portugal on alcohol in the workplace. It has also recently produced and adopted a response to the Amsterdam Group report for submission to the EU¹.

Established in 1985, Réseau Européen de Prévention en Entreprise (REPE) represents a collaboration between France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal and Switzerland to combat problems related to alcohol and drugs in the workplace. It develops prevention programmes and individual responses to alcohol problems at the workplace in the respective participating countries. It has established mechanisms for monitoring and provided advice on a number of aspects of workplace policies.

Avholdsfolkets Landsnemnd (Norwegian Temperance Alliance) is a union of 17 temperance organizations with a total of 80 000 individual members. It covers a wide spectrum of interest groups: youth, women and Christian. It has recently been awarded funding from the Norwegian Government to establish an office in Brussels.

EAAP and NGOs

The background to the EAAP was presented to the participants and attention was drawn to the problems involved in implementing the Plan. There is a definite need for partnerships and alliances in

¹ *Alcoholic beverages and European society. A report by the Amsterdam Group. 1993.*

building a European-wide advocacy network. It is important to accept that different countries have different approaches, but also to note the clear evidence of the validity of a strategy to reduce overall consumption. Alcohol presents a problem for society, not just for individuals.

The nine strategic areas of implementation of the EAAP were outlined along with WHO's role in addressing them. WHO should stress the importance of NGOs as collaborative partners to government bodies in tackling alcohol issues; provide information and materials; and support applications for funding bids to government or other bodies.

Participants pointed out that there is no evidence that targeting high-risk behaviour alone is effective and that the report by the Amsterdam Group presented recently to the EU had not adequately addressed this question.

The role of NGOs on alcohol action in Italy

The range and scope of responses to alcohol-related problems in the Veneto Region were set out. The aim is to create a network of projects among general practitioners and other health care providers, so that everyone affected by alcohol-related problems (including families) can have equal access to both primary and specialist care. A long-term objective is to launch prevention initiatives in a broad range of settings. It was important to acknowledge the role of self-help groups in achieving these aims and in particular the Clubs for Alcoholics undergoing Treatment (CATS). However, the immediate problem is to counter the imbalance between alcohol and drugs in the allocation of resources for prevention activities.

There is quite a variety of NGOs involved in tackling alcohol issues in Italy; for example, the Società Italiana di Alcologia, which is a scientific society that promotes research and health through epidemiological surveys and the training of health care workers. It publishes a journal in Italian and English and has acted in an advisory capacity to the Ministry of Health.

Gruppo Aliseo provides help and advice to drinkers and their families and carries out prevention activities, awareness training

and research updates for a wide range of professionals and nonprofessionals.

The Osservatoria Permanente Sui Giovani E L'Alcol (Observatory on Alcohol and Youth) was established in 1990 to carry out research on consumption patterns and young people's attitudes towards drink in order to assist policy formulation. Its work includes a survey comparing groups in different parts of Europe for the EU. The Istituto Andrea Devoto is a network of independent organizations whose purpose is to share information and coordinate activities on substance abuse. It also supports experimental projects to develop new approaches to tackling alcohol-related and other problems.

Discussion focused on the significant drop in recorded alcohol consumption in Italy in recent years and what factors had contributed to this. While there was no single reason for the decline in alcohol use, it was felt that recent action drawing attention to alcohol-related problems had for the first time led Italians to consider this issue in the context of healthy lifestyles. Self-help groups had been influential in raising this debate. The shift in population from rural to urban areas may also have played a role.

It was unclear to what extent alcohol-related problems had decreased in line with changes in the consumption pattern, but the participants felt it was important to target high-risk groups as well as reduce overall consumption.

Implementation of the European Alcohol Action Plan

An introduction was given on current WHO activities in pursuit of the EAAP. Particular attention was drawn to the publication of a book entitled *Alcohol policy and the public good* produced by a group of internationally renowned scientists, and a series of booklets that were to be produced in preparation for the Paris Conference. Other examples of collaboration were with the United Kingdom prisons service and the WHO countrywide integrated noncommunicable disease intervention (CINDI) programme. The importance of collaboration at local, national and international levels was emphasized. The recent meeting of national counterparts in Vienna had been an important step in this respect, and it was hoped that a

network of NGOs could both influence and support the work of these counterparts.

Participants suggested that it would be necessary to take a number of different approaches to evaluating the work carried out under the EAAP. Whereas some initiatives could be evaluated scientifically, others should be evaluated on the basis of their political impact. They also stressed that specialist services could not tackle alcohol problems alone and that efforts should be made to develop an awareness and understanding of the public health approach.

In support of the move to set up an NGO network, the Istituto Andrea Devoto had circulated a questionnaire to participating organizations in order to gather baseline data, together with views on how an information system might be set up. The principal concern of those responding was to establish easy access to the information each organization had to offer the network.

Developing networking between NGOs in Europe

The participants discussed how their respective organizations could contribute towards establishing a network and some of the issues involved.

The Independent Sobriety Association International, Russian Federation, has already benefited greatly from contacts with other NGOs. However much of this contact has been with temperance organizations rather than with organizations that apply a broader range of approaches. The Association would be interested in the exchange of specialists. As its approach coincides with that of WHO, a WHO network would be of considerable importance, as would cooperation in resisting the assault of western alcohol producers on the new eastern European markets. The Association also felt that establishing an NGO network in central and eastern Europe, where there is little experience of such development and a suspicion of input from western Europe, is also quite important.

Alcohol Concern, United Kingdom, felt it was important to establish a network to increase effectiveness in meeting aims at a national as well as a European level. A network would be useful in combating both the influence of the alcohol industry and the tendency for alcohol consumption to be given low political priority.

However, the difficulties involved need to be acknowledged and all members of the network should be prepared to accept the differences in approach between different countries. In moving forward the most should be made of the many existing international networks. The aims should be to create pressure on national and European institutions, to share information and experiences of successful initiatives, and to develop common tools and measurements for the assessment of alcohol-related harm. Achieving this requires that frameworks be created for the exchange of information, in order to provide briefing and other relevant input to other related sectors so as to draw them into support of the network and to establish aims and targets for action around the sorts of social issues that will gain popular support.

The International Order of Good Templars (IOGT) felt that the network should be clear about its membership and that only true NGOs with a clear commitment to advocacy should be accepted. IOGT further suggested that the network take a clear public health approach (e.g. to include the aspect of social harm) and that its agenda also cover care for the victims of alcohol-related problems, protection of third parties and the exemption of alcohol from free-trade agreements. IOGT also expressed hopes that existing international networks could be brought together in projects that strive towards developing prevention work in postcommunist countries, security initiatives and advocacy of a joint agenda for the EU.

Although there was a long history of successful networking on alcohol issues, the representative of the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA) felt that the field had also been bedevilled by fragmentation. It was important to bring the different networks together and to make them aware of the EAAP's aims. Particular attention should be paid to influencing the Paris Conference through local counterparts and to drawing in other ministries in addition to health. The network should look at some of the economic issues that might have a bearing on alcohol policy, including agriculture and employment in the alcohol beverage sector, export revenue and EU border policies and controls.

Outcomes of working groups

Three working groups were formed to consider the questions:

- do we need a NGO network?
- if so, how should it work?
- should the network include non-alcohol NGOs and if so which ones?
- how should NGOs support the Paris Conference?

In reporting back it was clear that each group considered that there was a need for a network, but not for another bureaucratic structure. There was general agreement that existing networks (ICAA, IOGT, EUROCARE) and umbrella bodies should, if possible, be brought together and used for this purpose. The working groups also agreed that it is necessary to be clear as to whom would be eligible to become a member of the network before issuing further invitations to join. Steps should be taken to help organizations from poorer countries participate. The focus of the network should be on the establishment of an information exchange that would draw its strength from the diversity of the participating bodies.

While each of the working groups valued the principle of collaboration with non-alcohol NGOs, they also felt that this should only be undertaken where there was a defined purpose and goal. These NGOs would then be partners, rather than members, of the network. Among the examples given were health insurance companies, trade unions, transport groups and consumer groups.

Each of the groups considered it important for NGOs to be involved in the Paris Conference. A range of suggestions were made; those considered most practical – and therefore adopted – were firstly for NGOs to advise (and if possible be part of) their own national delegation and, secondly, to prepare a "White Book" which would set out the principal issues for each country in implementing the EAAP. These two initiatives would form the basis of NGO input to the Conference.

Methods of cooperation for an NGO network

Since alcohol consumption is a multidimensional issue it can only be tackled through multidimensional approaches. The development of a European network could assist with this, fostering mutual help and cooperation. Collaboration is also important, however, between NGOs, government organizations and scientific organizations, and WHO might be a focal point for this. Methods of cooperation could be establishing computer networks, holding meetings and workshops or issuing a specialized journal; for example, *Alcologia*, which is produced in Italian and English by the Società Italiana di Alcologia, might be a vehicle for communication within the NGO network.

One of the participants commended WHO on the EAAP but highlighted the huge policy differences between different European countries and the important role played by economic issues – even between the different regions of one country. He pointed to the range of interests and bodies that have to be involved in order to build an effective alcohol policy, using the United Kingdom as an example of where these have been identified. He emphasized the importance, above all, of involving health policy planners, health professionals, researchers and NGOs together with government at both national and local levels.

A number of participants stressed the importance of not taking on more than the network could realistically cope with and of recognizing that most objectives will be long term. It was agreed that the focus of the activity should be on advocacy and that, in the short term, a focus on the Paris Conference offered a realistic and positive objective.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The following timetable should be adopted:

January 1995	WHO/EURO, IOGT, ICAA and EURO-CARE to draft a special statement on policy issues for the Paris Conference.
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- June 1995 ICAA meeting in Trieste: 10-12 organizations to take part in discussing the draft.
- September 1995 Consultation meeting, London (EURO-CARE) to adopt statement.

2. The NGO meeting at the Paris Conference should be a press conference at which the White Book is presented.
3. The White Book should be published separately. The Andrea Devoto Istituto will take responsibility for coordination and will draw up a clear plan and proposal.
4. EURO-CARE agreed to begin preparation of a newsletter and ADIC will provide technical assistance to create an electronic mail system. Assistance to central and eastern European countries should be emphasized.
5. Mechanisms for inviting countries not represented at the meeting should be established.
6. Alcohol action in Europe must involve a long-term strategy as part of a broader health policy. The EAAP is an important component in this; the Paris Conference offers an opportunity to broaden activity to different sectors.
7. The European network of NGOs for action on alcohol offered a further important dimension to the successful implementation of the EAAP.

*Annex 1***PARTICIPANTS****Nongovernmental Organizations***Alcohol Concern*

Mr Eric Appleby
London, United Kingdom (*Rapporteur*)

Association nationale de prévention de l'alcoolisme (ANPA)

Mr Claude Rivière
Vandœuvre-lès-Nancy, France

Avholdsfolkets Landsnemnd

Ms May-Elin Stener
Oslo, Norway

*Deutsche Hauptstelle gegen die Suchtgefahren (DHS)
German Council on Dependence*

Mr Christian Bölckow
Hamm, Germany

EUROCARE

Mr Derek Rutherford
St Ives, Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom

Independent Sobriety Association International

Dr Vladimir Lovchev
Kazan, Tatarstan, Russian Federation

International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA)

Mr Archer Tongue
Lausanne, Switzerland

International Drivers' Behaviour Research Association (IDBRA)

Mr Timothy Benjamin
Neuilly, France

International Order of Good Templars (IOGT)

Mr Helge J. Kolstad
International President
Trogstad, Norway

*Polish IOGT Foundation**Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC)*

Dr Jacek Morawski
Warsaw, Poland

Réseau Européen de Prévention en Entreprise (REPE)

Mr Jean J. Franck
Luxembourg

Observers*Alcol Sti Anonimi*

Sig. Paolo Montagner
Treviso, Italy

Associazione Innovo

Dr Massimo Schneider
Tolmezzo, Italy

Comunità San Francesco

Dr Sartino Pante
Monselice (Padua), Italy

Fondazione Istituto Andrea Devoto

Dr Valentino Patussi
Florence, Italy

Gruppo Abele/Aliseo

Dr Giuseppe Maranzano
Turin, Italy

Istituto Andrea Devoto – Ufficio Eurocare Italia

Dr Vanna Cerrato
Padua, Italy

Osservatorio Permanente Sui Giovani e l'Alcol

Dr Daniel Rossi
Rome, Italy

Società Italiana di Alcologia (SIA)

European Journal of Alcohol Studies
Dr Giuseppe Francesco Stefanini (President)
Ist. Patologia Medica 1, Università di Bologna, Policlinico
S. Orsola, Italy

Dr Valentino Patussi (*Secretary*)
Centro di Alcologia, U.O. di Gastroenterologia, Università di
Florence, Italy

University of Padua – Institute of Internal Medicine

Dr Elisabetta Baldi
Padua, Italy

Local Organizers

Istituto di Medicina Interna

Professor Remo Naccarato
Università di Padova (*Chairperson*)

Padua Healthy Cities Project

Dr Franco Marcomini
Comune di Padova

WHO Regional Office for Europe

Dr Peter Anderson
Acting Scientist, Alcohol Action Plan

Mr Constantin Krasovsky
Consultant, Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco