

To: Chair and members of the Expert Panel on Better Ways of Investing in Health

Brussels, 6 October 2020

Dear Professor De Maeseneer,

We write to you in your role as chair of the Expert Panel on Better Ways of Investing in Health, more specifically concerning the work of this Platform on care organisation following the COVID19 pandemic.

At Eurocarers, we warmly welcome this work and its focus; and in this context we would like to ask you to consider the heavy impact of the COVID-19 crisis on informal carers.

As you probably know already, it is estimated that, in the EU, 80% of long-term care of people with a chronic illness, disability or other long-lasting care needs is provided by family members, friends or neighbours who often do this unpaid and with minimal support. Due to the lack of recognition and support, many of these 'informal carers' pay a high price for their caregiving in terms of negative health, social and employment outcomes. These people also too often feel invisible and ignored.

The data that is gradually emerging from our network clearly shows that the COVID-19 crisis and the policy responses to it have done nothing but to aggravate the challenges facing carers. Confinement measures and the reallocation of professional care services to the most severe cases have indeed greatly enhanced carers' isolation and have deprived them of their usual support systems – when they existed. As a result, many carers have found themselves in first line in the provision of care to dependent people and despite the fact that, statistically speaking, a large portion of carers belongs to the most at-risk age groups.

Moreover, the COVID-19 outbreak has converted millions of people across the EU into unpaid carers thereby creating a new population of informal carers. For instance, in the UK, it is estimated that 4.5 million more people are now caring for older, disabled or seriously ill family or friends as a result of the pandemic - on top of the 9.1 million people who were already involved in caregiving before the crisis. We also know that, as a result of lockdowns and the amalgamation of both childcare and informal long-term care, women's share of unpaid work is likely to have considerably increased.

In other words, carers, are now providing even more support without the guidance and practical support they need or would normally rely on, under increased pressure to protect themselves from infection and prevent transmission to the person they care for. If not properly addressed, the COVID crisis will continue to have a stronger impact on carers and their families than on the population in general.

It is clear: governments across the EU must not take unpaid carers for granted in this crisis; rather, they must ensure that their physical and mental health is looked after and that they are enabled to continue caring, only if they wish to and with adequate support.

Even before the pandemic, long-term care systems and support measures targeted at carers were falling short; the time has now come to truly reflect upon and engage in the much-needed reform for an approach to people-centred long-term care. Moving out of the pandemic, governments should rebuild their care systems so that carers are supported and families have the services they need to live healthier, better and more balanced lives. Last but not least, the value of informal care should not only relate to its economic contribution; informal care is rooted in solidarity.

Given the above, we warmly invite you to include carers in part C of the upcoming Panel's report, which classifies vulnerable people. More specifically, carers could be added to part (a), as follows; *'medically vulnerable, such as the elderly, those with underlying health conditions and their informal carers'.*

With a new economic crisis looming - and its accompanying set of austerity measures, we cannot afford to leave aside support measures for informal carers any longer. This is not only crucial for the long-term sustainability of our care systems; it is also imperative from a human rights' perspective.

We thank you in advance for your attention and interest. If helpful, we of course remain at your disposal for more information as we continue to carry out our own research on the impact of the pandemic on informal carers across Europe.

With best wishes,



Sari Tervonen
President Eurocarers



Stecy Yghemonos
Executive Director