

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL TUESDAY 5 MARCH 2013, 21.30 CEST**

**EFCNI and WHO call for urgent action on maternal and newborn health across Europe**

*With 10% of the EU population born preterm and suffering long-term health consequences as a result, health experts, WHO officials, EU policy makers and parent representatives, have come together to address the dramatic health inequalities of these infants and their families, both globally and throughout Europe.*

**Brussels 5 March 2013** – Europe faces a major challenge in relation to maternal and newborn health as quality of care varies widely across the EU according to the outcomes of an EFCNI-WHO event. This is compounded in the case of vulnerable groups, including preterm infants, who require specialist care and attention that is not always provided.

The event, organised in association with the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, comes further to a WHO Report<sup>1</sup> from May 2012 that identified that preterm birth is the second leading cause of death globally for children under five. With the rate of preterm birth growing in most countries, the participants called for more work to be done to fight health complications and morbidities. Supported by EFCNI and WHO partners, participants called for maternal and newborn health to become a public health policy priority for all European governments.

Dr Angelika Niebler, MEP, demanded action *“We cannot underestimate the importance of high quality maternal care and a healthy birth. We need to ensure that all Europeans are able to have healthy pregnancies and enjoy the best possible start to life, irrespective of their background or nationality. European and national policy makers need to work together to make this a reality. EFCNI and the WHO have made an important contribution to bringing attention to the problems, which are clearly linked to issues high on the European policy agenda, such as chronic conditions. We now need commitment at European level that the proper policy is in place and that care plans are able to deliver better outcomes.”*

Silke Mader, Chairwoman of the Executive Board of EFCNI, commented *“Preterm infants constitute Europe’s largest child patient group who are at a higher risk of developing both short and long term health complications. No less than one in ten families need to cope with the health difficulties that come with preterm birth. There are solutions available for these families, but they are not being implemented. Tonight at our joint WHO event this important fact was recognised and concrete solutions for improving European maternal and newborn health were endorsed.”*

Some of the solutions discussed include the need to increase healthy pregnancies, effective maternal care and prevent preterm birth. Experts agreed that *Caring for Tomorrow: EFCNI White Paper on Maternal and Newborn Health and Aftercare Services*<sup>2</sup> provides a good basis for identifying recommendations on how European health systems could improve. Emphasis was placed on the need to develop European high quality standards for prevention, treatment and long-term care, the support of greater research, education and exchange, as well as streamlined and targeted information for parents.

The event, organised in association with the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU and in close collaboration with EFCNI’s national partners and European healthcare societies, was

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<sup>1</sup> Born Too Soon: The Global Action Report on Preterm Birth  
[http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/news/2012/preterm\\_birth\\_report/en/index1.html](http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/news/2012/preterm_birth_report/en/index1.html)

<sup>2</sup> Caring for Tomorrow: EFCNI White Paper on Maternal and Newborn Health and Aftercare Services, 23 November 2011.  
<http://www.efcni.org/index.php?id=1888>

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the first step towards developing standards of care for maternal and newborn health. Indeed, this meeting marks the establishment of an EU-wide network of stakeholders and parent representatives, led by EFCNI to create a way to benchmark existing care practices across Europe and establish recognised standards for delivering high quality care.

Prof. Marleen Temmerman, Director of the Department of Reproductive Health and Research, WHO, added *“Tonight we have focused on the need to prevent preterm birth, which has huge impacts on families all over the world. The financial burdens for families and society at large are unsustainable. We must act now to ensure that preterm infants and their families receive the high quality care that they are entitled to and deserve. This will reduce health challenges in the future and make societies healthier”*.

The event featured globally recognised experts in maternal and newborn health as speakers, including Prof. Dr. Kypros H. Nicolaides, Director of The Fetal Medicine Foundation; Prof. Dr. Dietmar Schleich, faculty member of the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena (Germany), Dept. of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Head of the Division of Prenatal Diagnosis & Fetal Physiology; Prof Dr. Luc Zimmermann, President of the European Society for Paediatric Research and Mandy Daly, patient representative from Ireland.

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**About EFCNI**

The European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI) is the first pan-European organisation to represent the interests of preterm and newborn infants and their families. It gathers together parents and healthcare experts from different disciplines with the common goal of improving long-term health of preterm and newborn children by ensuring the best possible prevention, treatment, care and support. For more information: <http://www.efcni.org/>

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