

To:

The Chair and Vice-Chairs of the COVI committee in the EU Parliament

The Political groups coordinators

The Policy advisors

The Rapporteur and co-rapporteurs of the COVI committee report

Rebalancing priorities in the draft COVI committee report

“COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future”

Dear Sir/Madam,

AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) is the world’s largest non-governmental organisation that provides medical care and support to patients affected by HIV. Based on our experience from the field from our clinics and beyond, we advocate for efficient and inclusive healthcare systems. **During the COVID-19 pandemic, we continued to provide our services to some of the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups in society.**

AHF Europe would like to **thank the members of COVI for their hard work collecting the testimonies from relevant stakeholders**, and recognizes the effort of the committee to summarize them into one report and recommendations. The report is an unprecedented opportunity to send the right message, focus political attention on health priorities, and better prepare for future health crises.

Nevertheless, AHF Europe expresses **deep regret about the overall focus of the draft report, which does not reflect the reality of crisis management and does not have a holistic view of all Public Health actors involved**. As opposed to the mandate of the committee to reflect on lessons learned and suggest measures for the future, the draft report lacks considerations about the commitment of the EU institutions and clear indications on how to move forward.

While amendments on concrete paragraphs of the draft report would be too many to enumerate, AHF Europe invites the coordinators to **recalibrate the current business-oriented approach** towards the needs of people and communities. **Health and protection of people’s lives should always come above any economic interest**. We hope the final report will have a different focus by strengthening several fundamental blocks:

1. **Recognition of the role of civil society in pandemic response**. The draft report excessively focuses on the role of the innovative private sector, but omits to recognise the operational support provided by civil society in the times of crisis. There is no mentioning of how these actors are the first to intervene when the health workforce resources are exhausted. **We urge the committee to include a sub-chapter on civil society organisations under chapter 1 on health**, to highlight their added value and confirm their role in the decision-making process, not only during the crisis but also during the preparatory stage. Recognising the role of civil society includes non-medical community workers, non-elected community leaders and own-responsibility to

contribute to the management of pandemics. **These principles should especially be reflected in paragraphs 19, 48, 111, 112 and 216.**

2. Using **all means to guaranty equitable access** to medical countermeasures and related products. AHF Europe is deeply disappointed with the draft report's unbalanced focus on incentives for industry. We fully recognize the importance of innovative products for health, but people should be able to easily benefit from this innovation. **Public financing should be linked with conditions for affordability, availability, and publication of data to improve democratic controls.** Incentives should also require the industry's engagement to non-abusive profit strategies and prioritization of responding to the most imminent needs, instead of pumping benefits and evergreening the finances. All available tools should be deployed to increase access, including IP rights waivers, transparency of pricing and supply chains, investing into local manufacturing and sharing of know-how (paragraphs 58, 63, 61,66, 71, 90, 92, 97, 230, 131, 213). The protectionist and offensive vocabulary should be excluded from the report, as **solidarity is the core effective principle of managing pandemics that know no borders.** Therefore, pandemic medical countermeasures production should prioritise saving the most vulnerable groups at the global level to maximise their beneficial impact.
3. Rebuilding trust by **better communication and investing in health literacy.** Currently the report recommends better communication only with the aim to increase trust in vaccination. **Clear communication plays a crucial role at every stage of pandemics, from prevention to recovery, and unfortunately this is underscored in the draft report.** AHF Europe does not agree that the communication should only focus on vaccine hesitancy as pandemics touch many layers of people's life: **mental health, family violence, willingness to follow the rules that may affect personal liberties, questioning of the validity of specific measures.** Direct and transparent communication, recognizing the importance of the workforce profession, is necessary to efficiently manage pandemics and rebuild trust in decision makers. Only evidence based, scientifically grounded choices shall be the basis of decision-making and well explained to the population, while public communication campaigns should include tailored content to specific groups.

Thank you for your attention and for taking our suggestions into account. We are happy to provide additional comments on the report, including specific wording for paragraphs amendments, and look forward to the deliberations in the European Parliament.

Best wishes,

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