**AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY OF MADRID'S PUBLIC HEALTH WORKERS STATEMENT**

## Madrid's Regional Government abolishes the Public Health Structure from the Regional Health Authority. April 10th, 2008.

The Regional Health Authority´s new structure, designed by the Council of Government and stipulated by the President of the Community of Madrid, Mrs. Esperanza Aguirre, and the Regional Health Minister, Mr. Juan José Güemes, in Decree-laws 22/2008, 23/2008 and 24/2008, dated April 3rd, was published in Madrid Community's Official Bulletin (BOCM) of April 9th 2008. This major decision, taken completely apart from the public health workers´ collective, eliminates the "Dirección General de Salud Pública y Alimentación de la Comunidad de Madrid" (Main Directorate of Public Health and Nutrition) and abolishes the "Instituto de Salud Pública" (Public Health Institute).

We, professionals assigned to the Main Directorate of Public Health and Nutrition (including experts on a broad range of disciplines, such as veterinary, medicine, pharmacy, nursing, sociology, social work, psychology, computer sciences, biology, geography, demography, administration and others professionals), want to show our deep concern and express our worry on account of this situation.

We regard these Decrees as a serious error because of the negative consequences that they will have for the health of the population living at the Community of Madrid.

The new structure designed by this Decree does not include any equivalence of the Main Directorate of Public Health and Nutrition, until now existing, and fragments its functions spreading them over the organizational chart within Madrid's Regional Ministry of Health.

These changes weaken and severely threaten the core-functions of Public Health in our Community and suppose a key step back, diminishing the vast organizational and professional experience accumulated during the last three decades in the Madrid Region. We next expose some of the reasons that support the previous affirmations:

- The main goal of Public Health is to protect and to promote the health of the population as a whole, anticipating the appearance of disease and suffering. Public Health develops activities that are essential for keeping people healthy, such as to guarantee drinkable water and food safety, to maintain an adequate

sanitary control of slaughterhouses, to develop immunization calendars, to monitor public workers´ health status, to monitor and control epidemics, and to implement interventions to inform and raise awareness about the different risks for health and healthy behaviours.

- Such crucial issues for Madrid's population as "the crazy cows crisis", "Belgian chicken dioxins", legionella or meningitis outbreaks, were effectively solved thanks to coordinated and quick intervention and technical effectiveness on behalf of the now disappeared Main Directorate of Public Health and Nutrition, , organism that had integrated and centralized all the public health functions and institutional competences at the Regional level. These health-related issues would have continued being a threat and would have created much more social alarm had they not been adequately solved at that moment.
- All the Autonomous Communities that integrate our country, Spain, have a Main Directorate of Public Health, and those which decided to suppress it in the past, turned back to create it again, due to its importance in making possible a rational and coordinated leadership to tackle the broad range of competencies that integrate Public Health. The socially most advanced European States promote this type of organisms and the European Commission's new health strategy for Europe gives high priority to the interventions that are usually developed in the Main Directorates of Public Health. International reference organisms such as the World Health Organization also recommend to strengthen and to promote Public Health.

- Madrid's population confronts at the present moment challenges as complex as the progressive ageing of the population, sedentary life style and the increasing rate of obesity, and will have to tackle and solve possible crises like an influenza pandemics or the appearance of new diseases caused by environmental infectious or toxic agents in a near future.

For all the reasons put forward previously, we request the restitution of a unique organism, with enough hierarchical entity according to the responsibilities that it must assume and that fulfils the functions and competencies of Public Health in a coordinated way, such as the ones that exist in the National, European and International levels. We make this request endorsed by our professional experience and based on the present scientific knowledge.

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