

## Video and event summary of event of 12th February 2024 “The EU Pharmaceuticals – why should online access to prescription medicines be allowed?”

February 20, 2024

On 12 February 2024, the European Association of E-Pharmacies (EAEP) and the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacy in the EU (ASOP EU) co-hosted an event in Brussels to discuss patients' access to prescription medicines online in the European Union, particularly in light of the ongoing reform of the EU General Pharmaceutical Legislation, which presents an opportunity to enhance existing frameworks across the 27 EU Member States. The event aimed to facilitate a dynamic conversation on the benefits, challenges, and future trajectory of online access to prescription medicines. It targeted a diverse audience, including EU policymakers and major influencers in the EU health policy space with the goal of promoting the harmonisation of the EU's approach to online pharmacies.

A key highlight of the event was the official launch of the recently published [Copenhagen Economics report](#), “**Unlocking the Benefits of Online Access to Prescription Medicines Across the EU**”, commissioned by ASOP EU. Bruno Basalisco, Director of Copenhagen Economics, presented the findings of the report, which examines the benefits – or potential benefits – for patients of access to prescription medicines online, in Spain, France, Italy, Germany, and Sweden, unequivocally emphasising the urgent need for enhanced digital accessibility to, especially for individuals in rural areas and those managing chronic illnesses.

A **diverse array of speakers** contributed insightful perspectives on the role of online access in increasing the availability of safe medicine. Key points from the moderator and panel included:

- **Mike Isles - moderator** (ASOP EU) stated that this comprehensive 5000 respondents' evidence-based report will be instrumental in highlighting how all EU citizens should have the same rights to access their prescription medicines as in other Member States. Digital pharmacy services are rapidly developing and are a crucial tool to enhance healthcare across the EU and beyond. In addition, the sooner the public are knowledgeable about where to obtain their medicines safely online, the sooner the battle against falsified medicines will be won.
- **MEP Antonius Manders** (EPP, Netherlands), who advocated for the need to convince citizens of the benefits of online access to prescription medicines as increased public demand can drive policymakers to respond accordingly.
- **Anne Roberts**, partner at Sidney Austin LLP, specialising in the life science sector, who highlighted that despite the introduction of Article 85c in Directive 2001/83/EC that grants Member States (MS) the authority to prohibit the online sale of prescription medicines, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) increasingly recognises the benefits of allowing online access to prescription medicines for patients. Other trends observed in the CJEU opinions include the diminishing justification for blanket prohibitions, and a deeper scrutiny of Member States'; public health justifications and their proportionality.
- **Pit Janssen**, pharmacist and MedApp co-founder, who shared the value of online pharmacy services in enhancing convenience by streamlining medication management, addressing

supply chain issues, and combating non-adherence. Features like stock monitoring, reminders, and patients having the ability to ask queries at any time is especially useful for chronically ill patients that require many medications.

- Advocate, **Margot Voskamp** (Communications Officer at World Federation of Incontinence and Pelvic Problems), who shared a personal experience, illustrated how online access reduced medicine wastage, better organises medication stock, alleviates the burden on carers and patients, including time-savings, and improved adherence.
- **Stecy Yghemonos**, Executive Director of the European Association Working for Carers, who (via a video message) reinforced the significant time-saving benefits of online access for carers and chronically ill individuals in rural areas. To ensure trust and safety, Yghemonos stressed the importance of educating carers and patients on discerning the credibility and reliability of online pharmacies.

The event also provided a valuable opportunity for the audience to ask questions, including representatives from:

- The European Commission's **Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety** (DG SANTE);
- Patient and advocacy groups including the **European Patients' Forum, Affordable Medicine's Europe, European Cancer Organisation, Health First Europe**;
- Industry representatives from **Ecommerce Europe, Medicttech Solutions, and Amazon**;
- The **Taiwan office in the EU**.

Despite concerns raised on **quality assurance** and the **threat of falsified production**, speakers reinforced the Falsified Medicines Directive, introduced by the EU in 2011, which gives clear instructions on verifying the reliability of medicines and safety features for prescription packaging. The challenge remains that Member States have **not sufficiently promoted awareness of the EU Common Logo**, hindering the education on safe access and purchase of online medicines. The Copenhagen Economics report highlights that a significant percentage of respondents in all surveyed countries are unaware of the mandatory EU Common Logo designed for patients to identify authorised online pharmacies.

In response, future actions should prioritise **increased promotion and education** on the benefits of online access to medicines, and how to identify safe sellers (EU logo accreditation). Additionally, as brick-and-mortar pharmacies organisations lobby against the e-pharmacy model, **increased public engagement** is crucial to build momentum for online access, pressuring physical pharmacies to adapt with innovative business models including omnichannel options for patients.

