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AESGP Meeting: Industry Must Be 'Organized, Bold And Unapologetic' About Value Of Self-Care

by [David Ridley](#)

The Association of the European Self-Care Industry's 60th Annual Meeting in Brussels, Belgium, opens with a rousing call to action from president Jonathan Workman. Looking to the upcoming EU elections, Workman urges industry to push for widening access to OTC medicines through switch, digital and sustainable investment, improved health literacy and regulatory flexibility.

Faced with an “unprecedented” number of EU regulations, the self-care industry needs to be “organized, bold, and unapologetic” about the critical role it can play in securing a “healthier, more competitive, and ultimately stronger Europe.”

This was the forceful message delivered by Association of the European Self-Care Industry president and Haleon Northern Europe general manager Jonathan Workman as he opened the association’s 60th Annual Meeting in Brussels, Belgium.

Listing a selection from the “huge volume” of EU regulations currently facing industry, from the sector specific Medical Device Regulation (MDR) and pharmaceutical legislation revision, to the more general and wide-ranging EU Green Deal, Workman warned that regulators risked “limiting access to many of our products.”

“We also have concerns about the competitiveness of Europe as a place to do business,” Workman continued. Sustainability legislation, for example, should provide “competitive advantage for European businesses and not a barrier for innovation or consumer choices.”

Given the enormous pressure on public health systems, the contribution of self-care is “absolutely crucial,” Workman added, pointing to AESGP research showing that self-care saves Europe €34bn (\$37bn) annually and could save an extra €17.6bn if more products were available for self-manageable conditions.

Call To Action

Looking ahead to the European Union elections – which will be held on 6-9 June and bring a new Parliament and Commission – Workman issued delegates with four “calls to action” to realize self-care’s full potential.

Firstly, he called for widening access to healthcare solutions. This would involve creating a regulatory landscape that fosters Rx-to-OTC switch, drawing on successful experiences in EU member states and non-EU countries; including self-care products in patient health registries so that real world data can be used to find new indications of use; and removing uncertainty with regards to medical device regulation by resolving problems with the MDR.

Secondly, Workman advocated for a Europe that “champions sustainable healthcare investment.” This would mean “incorporating cost effective self-care into EU public health strategies and investing in healthcare solutions for self-assessment and self-treatment, thereby improving people's wellbeing, autonomy and productivity, while also relieving pressure on national healthcare systems and budgets.”

Digital technology must also be leveraged for innovation and personalization, as well as disease prevention and early diagnosis, he continued, while healthcare policies should be evidence-based and aligned with the United Nations’ sustainable development goals.

“However, we have to balance the environmental risks with the social and health benefits, particularly around accessibility and availability,” he warned. This could be interpreted as a reference to the European Commission’s pharma review proposals to make all antimicrobials prescription-only as part of its efforts to combat antimicrobial resistance. (Also see "[Why Did The European Commission Decide All Antimicrobials Should Be Rx-Only?](#)" - HBW Insight, 16 Nov, 2023.)

Health Literacy

Workman’s third call to action concerned health education and empowering citizens. “We need to develop European guidelines to improve health literacy, including patient communication, and promote informed decision making on the part of individuals,” he said.

“We need to empower individuals to actively participate in their healthcare journey, providing safe and effective products for self-assessment, self-management, and self-care. We need to promote healthy lifestyle choices, such as nutrition and exercise and addiction avoidance, whilst providing essential self-care for the different phases of life, and we need to enable healthcare

professionals to support and advise people in taking better care of their health, with the innovative self-care tools available.”

Workman’s final call to action related to creating a “competitive and inclusive European industrial landscape” by “fostering global trade leadership, and maintaining Europe's attractiveness for investment and exports.”

This could be achieved by establishing a European parliamentary committee focused on EU healthcare policy and strategy, he suggested, as well as advocating for “agile regulatory frameworks that help and support healthcare goals, reinforce efficiency, environmental sustainability and economic growth.”

Look out for further coverage of the AESGP Annual Meeting in HBW Insight.