Drug shortages are a major public health threat in Europe and affect supplies of all kind, from painkillers to cancer treatments. This is a longstanding problem, but the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted even more the weak links in the supply chain.

Here are BEUC’s asks for the EU to ensure consumers get the medicines they need when they need them.

1. COMMON TERMINOLOGY
A general definition and criteria of what constitutes drug shortages should be included in EU pharmaceutical law. Making sure everyone is on the same page will make coordination and joint action more effective.

2. BETTER PREVENTION AND MONITORING
Competent authorities should require pharmaceutical companies to submit drug shortage prevention plans, so they can identify risks and promote mitigation measures.

3. STRENGTHENING SANCTIONS... AND APPLYING THEM
Member States should ensure that sanctions are dissuasive when companies do not comply with supply obligations – and apply them.

4. EARLY NOTIFICATION
All Member States must oblige pharmaceutical companies to notify them of drug shortages at least two months in advance, as the EU law says.

5. EASY CONSUMER REPORTING
Medicine users are the main victims of drug shortages. It should be possible and easy for consumers to report shortages to competent authorities, so we better understand the health and societal impact.

6. EFFECTIVE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION
Consumers must be timely informed about shortages, their starting date, duration, and alternative treatments. The European Medicines Agency’s listing of shortages should be turned into a comprehensive, user-friendly EU-wide database.

7. ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTION MODELS
The European Commission should map alternative production models, by public hospitals for instance. The EU should then promote best practices to increase the availability of medicines.

See our full position at: https://bit.ly/BEUCshortages

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