

The time is ripe for simplified front-of-pack labelling

29 November 2017

BEUC, EHN and EPHA are encouraged by the recent surge of attention to colour-coded front-of-pack nutrition labelling for food and drinks. However, industry-led actions currently planned in this area will not fulfill the fundamental purpose of such labelling.

Simplified nutrition labelling can play a key role in helping busy consumers to make more informed, healthier choices. The introduction of a well-conceived colour-coded front-of-pack scheme is widely recognised as an important component of a comprehensive strategy for reducing the health and economic burden of diet-related diseases. Such labelling must be understood at a glance by consumers and allow straightforward comparison between products.

We oppose moves to use portion sizes for colour-coded nutritional information. Not only will this make it harder for consumers to compare foods, but it is also likely to mislead them as to the nutritional quality of the product. This in turn defeats the point of having simplified nutritional information: to help the consumer select the healthier option.

Our organisations supported the introduction of a mandatory European front-of-pack labelling scheme during the negotiations for the Food Information to Consumers Regulation. Unfortunately, such labelling was not made mandatory. While this was a missed opportunity for consumers' rights and the health of European citizens, Member States do have the opportunity to introduce their own front-of-pack labelling schemes. Now that colour-coding is firmly back on the table, we call on EU Member States to avail themselves of this opportunity and adopt schemes to generate evidence on what works best. We also call on the European Commission to provide a platform to coordinate the evaluation of these efforts, with a view to proposing a common approach in the future.

Given the crucial importance of colour-coded front-of-pack labelling schemes, we strongly recommend that due process in designing them is put in place. The process should be transparent, inclusive, evidence-based, independent of commercial interests and endorsed by public authorities, drawing on the recent example in France.

About BEUC

The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) defends the interests of all Europe's consumers and represents 43 independent national consumer organisations from 31 European countries. We bring consumers' viewpoints from across Europe to the EU policy-making arena. www.beuc.eu. For further information, contact Pauline Constant, Tel +32 2 789 24 01 or email: Pauline.Constant@beuc.eu

About the European Heart Network

The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and likeminded non-governmental organisations throughout Europe, with member organisations in 25 countries. The EHN plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular diseases, in particular heart disease and stroke, through advocacy, networking, capacity-building and patient support, so that they are no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe. www.ehnheart.org. For further information, contact Marleen Kestens, Network Coordinator and Public Affairs Manager, European Heart Network, Brussels, Tel +32 2 512 91 74 or email: mkestens@ehnheart.org

About EPHA

The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) is a change agent – Europe's leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. Since formal establishment in spring 1993, EPHA has built a solid network of over 90 members dedicated to provide better health for all. www.eph.org. For further information, contact Nikolai Pushkarev, EPHA, Policy Coordinator Food, Drink & Agriculture, Tel +32 2 233 3876 or email: nikolai@epha.org