

**Ms Oomen Ruijten MEP (EPP, The Netherlands)** added: *“The big difference between the first report and the 2011 update is that this year’s version includes specific suggestions on how to go about NTD prevention. As policy makers we should pause, think and promote the implementation of these action-oriented solutions to ensure that pregnancy is not viewed only as a nine month process, but that it requires recognition of the importance of maternal health and in particular preconception care.”*

**Ms Edite Estrela MEP (S&D, Portugal)** added: *“It seems to me that not dealing with women’s folate levels, would mean that health inequalities would start before birth in Europe and widen further. This is all the more worrying as research seems to suggest that younger women and women of disadvantaged backgrounds are at a higher risk of having lower folate levels and therefore of having a NTD affected pregnancy. We all need to take stock of the evidence put forward and start working towards their implementation.”*

MediClara, Director projects and research, **Dr Denhard de Smit** added: *“There is a limited number of European countries where education campaigns on the importance of increasing women’s folate levels to prevent NTDs exist. MediClara’s pharmacy campaign in The Netherlands, which combined information on the need to raise folate levels with the purchase of contraceptives, proved to be a success as it targeted the right women (women of childbearing age) at the right time (before conception). Other countries should envisage similar campaigns.”*

The Chief Executive Officer of the European Organisation for Rare Diseases (EURORDIS), **Mr Yann Le Cam** added: *“EURORDIS is committed to pushing for more ambitious prevention strategies for the effective reduction of NTDs and of Spina Bifida, which is a severe rare disease. The question really is whether governments are as well.”*

The Chairwoman of the Executive Board of the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI), **Ms Silke Mader** added: *“Raising women’s folate levels is vital to secure a healthy pregnancy and reduce not only a NTD affected pregnancy but also to avoid preterm delivery. Despite the evidence on prevention, recommendations on folic acid intake are still not widely implemented. For us this means there is a need to rethink prevention strategies and this is why we have put forward these suggestions, which we hope policy makers will take on board.”*

The Secretary General of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), **Mr Luk Zelderloo** added: *“In the European Union, one in six people, i.e. 80 million, have a disability which often prevents them from access to society because of environmental and attitudinal barriers. All newborns, regardless of the severity of the birth defect, should have access to all available treatments, care and support that can improve their quality of life.”*

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