

116 117 – single European freephone number for medical on-call services

A project full of benefits without any obligations of implementation. The following shall answer the most important questions regarding the support of the project and the implementation of such a number in European Member States:

- **No obligation:** there is no obligation to introduce the number in one's own country. The aim is solely to reserve its availability throughout Europe. Those member countries interested would then have an option (by no means obligation) to make use of this phone number at a time of their choice. If a member state responds positively this would be similar to the effects of Article 43 of the EU Treaty ("enhanced cooperation"). Those Member States willing to introduce this number would subsequently not be prevented from doing so.
- **Keeping existing health services:** the health services of the member states remain, and no changes are made to them. It is only a sort of bridge to access the various health services.
- **Access to every on-call service:** the single number can be used to access every existing health service: on-call mobile services, health care centres, regional on-call service centres or national services in not life-threatening cases requiring medical treatment. The nature of the technical systems makes it possible to include all services and forward all calls accordingly.
- **Advantages for all concerned:**
 - One EU-wide, short and catchy number for on-call services, easy to remember, crucial for an ageing population;
 - Calls are toll-free and can be made at any time without prior registration;
 - No time-consuming searching in news papers or calls to directory inquiries;
 - A direct computer link to the next on-call medical centre (doctor or clinic);
 - Makes travel to other European countries much easier, because calls for medical help are easy and quick to make; even if a country does not introduce the number, its citizens benefit from easier access to medical help in other countries;
 - A number that can even offer information and assistance in different languages;
 - A number that reduces 112 calls for emergency services.
- **Reducing the amount of 112 calls for emergency services:**

There is no point in combining 116.117 with the existing 112 number for emergency services. Callers who dial 112 are connected to a call-centre that functions as an emergency centre, whereas 116 117 works computer-based and is therefore much less costly. Combining the two call systems in a common structure would require additional qualified staff, because the volume of 116.117 calls would remain even after combining with 112.
- **Developing and maintaining the system is within a reasonable budget:**

In Germany, with a population of 82 million (and relatively high prices for computer services), one-time expenditure on development, servers, entering data etc. amounts to approximately 100,000 Euro. The amount required for monthly maintenance is the same. In other EU countries these expenditures will differ accordingly to their price structures and number of inhabitants.
- **Cost savings for health services:**

Resident/local doctors would treat patients with only minor illnesses, rendering costly emergency transports and admittance to emergency rooms in hospitals unnecessary. In Germany a resident doctor receives about 55 euros¹ for making a house call. In contrast the arrival of an ambulance costs between 360 Euro and 500² Euro. For liability reasons an emergency doctor and emergency staff generally take the patient to a clinic, resulting in additional treatment and costs.

For further information please contact:

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¹ EBM, as per 01.04.05, no. 01101, p. 20, PW average

² Source: VdAK, LV Brandenburg