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#### NOTE

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Coordination and collaboration on post COVID-19 condition (Long Covid) <i>- Information from the Netherlands delegation</i>

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Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Netherlands delegation on the above mentioned subject to be raised under “Any other business” at the meeting of the EPSCO Council (Health) on 14 March 2023.

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## **Coordination and collaboration on post COVID-19 condition (Long Covid)**

In the European Union many people are affected by a post COVID-19 condition. The World Health Organization defines this condition, which is commonly also known as ‘long COVID’, as the continuation or development of new symptoms three months after the initial SARS-CoV-2 infection, with these symptoms lasting for at least two months with no other explanation.

It has been estimated that 12,5% of people infected by SARS-CoV-2 develop post COVID-19. At least sixty-five million individuals worldwide are estimated to have post COVID-19, with cases increasing daily. According to the background document of the European Commission for the 13 December 2022 EU-US Long COVID conference, EU Member States have responded in different ways to post COVID-19. The PHIRI project showed that in early 2022, several Member States had planned processes for a coordinated management, including for instance medical guidelines for diagnosis and treatment. At that time, some other Member States had partially planned processes for coordinated management. Only one Member State had a COVID registry with a focus on post COVID-19. It also has been reported that in some EU countries specialist post COVID-19 clinics have been set up. Besides, research has been initiated in several Member States and at international level. An overview to what all these separated planned processes and studies has led to, and will focus upon, is missing. In addition, coordination, and cooperation between institutes in the Member states alongside the research in the framework of Horizon Europe is often lacking.

Post COVID-19 prevents people from participating in the labor market. A study published in The Lancet found that 22% of people with post COVID-19 were unable to work due to ill health, and another 45% had to reduce hours worked. Post COVID-19 creates additional pressure on the healthcare system and, most importantly, severely affects the personal life of those affected. It is of utmost importance to ensure that people with post COVID-19 are able to participate in our society. Therefore, The Netherlands would like to advocate for extended attention regarding post COVID-19 in order to provide perspective to people affected by this condition.

Scientific research is crucial for providing perspective as it inter alia enables to make a diagnosis and draw up a treatment plan for those who experience the symptoms of post COVID-19. The Netherlands welcomes the research that is already being done nationally and internationally into post COVID-19, but an overview of these research and possible gaps on specific elements is still lacking. Moreover, it is important that research results reach healthcare providers, researchers, and patients as quickly as possible. This is especially true for potentially promising treatments on post COVID-19.

Therefore, on 9 December 2022, and in the framework of the Employment, Social Policy, Health, and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), The Netherlands called for a comprehensive and collaborative EU-wide effort to facilitate the exchange of best practices amongst clinical centers and practitioners and to develop an EU coordinated post COVID-19 research agenda. This call was supported by many Member States.

The Netherlands warmly welcomes the European Commission's response to this call by The Netherlands by starting the preparations to establish a network of expertise on post COVID-19 that was presented in the Public Health Expert Group on 3 February 2023. A European network of expertise which enables the exchange of national and international experiences together on the prevalence, diagnosis, treatment, and management of post COVID-19 patients, and identifies and fills knowledge gaps in research will have a high added value to what already happens at national level.

Therefore, The Netherlands calls upon all Member States to be ready to contribute to the network of expertise on post COVID-19 and to exchange their national experiences and expertise and to link their national research. The Netherlands welcomes these Member States which already have announced their participation to the network, and which take part in European research consortia in the framework of Horizon Europe.

To make a European network which also supports health care providers and patients properly, setting up an exchange of expertise mechanism at national level is a pre-condition. This could be established, for example by one or more indicated national centers of expertise which bring knowledge and experiences from practice in the field of post COVID-19 together and vice versa and at the same time could function as an active portal to the European network.

The Netherlands would like to invite the Council of Health ministers to express the need to take further actions and call upon Commissioner Kyriakides and Commissioner Gabriel to inform Member States, and keep them informed regularly, about the elaboration, progress, appropriate funding, and timelines of the announced network of expertise on post COVID-19 and any other actions.

Moreover, it is necessary that guidance to this network will be provided to let it function as effectively as possible and to facilitate initiatives starting as soon as possible, making use of appropriate EU funding.

The Netherlands looks forward to work together with all Member States and the European Commission to create a meaningful, collaborative, and comprehensive effort to provide perspective to those suffering from post COVID-19.