

# European Coalition for Community Living

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **The Right to Live in the Community Seminar: Towards a European strategy on de-institutionalisation of people with disabilities**

On 17 May 2006, in Brussels, the European Coalition for Community Living is organising a seminar on the right to community living for people with disabilities. Across Europe, thousands of people with disabilities still spend their lives segregated in institutions for people with disabilities<sup>1</sup>. There is an urgent need for a European strategy on de-institutionalisation, which includes the development of quality community-based services that promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

The Right to Live in the Community seminar is the first event organised by the European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL)<sup>2</sup>, a new Europe-wide initiative working towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities by promoting the provision of comprehensive, quality community-based services as an alternative to institutionalisation. With a growing membership across Europe, ECCL will advocate that de-institutionalisation is a priority on the agendas of disability organisations, service providers, governments and the European Union.

The May 17<sup>th</sup> seminar brings together key stakeholders in the de-institutionalisation process and the development of community-based services in Europe - self-advocates and users/survivors of psychiatry, representatives of disability organisations and de-institutionalisation initiatives, representatives of service providers, governments, academic institutions and the European Commission. During the day-long seminar, participants will share information, discuss models of good practice, identify existing obstacles and develop recommendations for a common European strategy on de-institutionalisation.

Speakers at the Right to Live in the Community seminar include Wallis Goelen (Head of the Disability Unit, European Commission), Ottmar Miles-Paul (March out of Institutions – Tear down the Walls Campaign, Germany), Steven Eidelman (Center for Disability Studies, University of Delaware, US), John Evans (European Network of Independent Living, UK), Kent Ericsson (University of Uppsala, Sweden) and Luk Zelderloo (European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities).

The very high interest in the seminar reflects recognition of the need for discussion about the issues, and the need to develop a strategy that will involve all stakeholders in the process of de-institutionalisation. It is also a positive sign for the European Coalition for Community Living, showing that its work on the promotion of community-based services for people with disabilities is not only necessary, but also very timely.

Contact Nathalie Moyersoen on + 32-495.26.01.84 for direct contact to the Management Partners of the European Coalition for Community Living for interviews and comments.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the situation in institutions and community-based services for people with disabilities in Europe, see 'Included in Society' report on [www.community-living.info](http://www.community-living.info).

<sup>2</sup> More information about the European Coalition for Community Living is available on [www.community-living.info](http://www.community-living.info).

## Background information

- **The European Coalition for Community Living**

The European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL) is a Europe-wide initiative working towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities by promoting the provision of comprehensive, quality community-based services as an alternative to institutionalisation.

ECCL advocates for and monitors progress towards de-institutionalisation in Europe, campaigns for, and provides information on, the development of comprehensive, quality community-based services and de-institutionalisation<sup>3</sup>.

ECCL uses the following definition of the term “institution”:

“An institution is any place in which people who have been labelled as having a disability are isolated, segregated and/or compelled to live together. An institution is also any place in which people do not have, or are not allowed to exercise control over their lives and their day-to-day decisions. An institution is not defined merely by its size.”

ECCL is a cross-disability initiative and targets all actors involved in the process of de-institutionalisation and the development and provision of community-based alternatives – local, national and regional authorities, the European Union, disability and other non governmental organisations, service provider organisations and staff of the existing institutions.

The founding organisations of ECCL are Autism Europe, the Center for Policy Studies of the Central European University, the European Network of Independent Living, Inclusion Europe, Mental Health Europe and the Open Society Mental Health Initiative.

Membership of ECCL is open to all organisations and individuals concerned with community living and de-institutionalisation of persons with disabilities. Since the beginning of this year, ECCL has expanded its membership into Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, the United Kingdom and the United States.

- **Included in Society**

The need for an initiative, such as ECCL, to promote de-institutionalisation and the development of community-based alternatives was demonstrated by the findings of the Included in Society project. Based on research into institutions and community-based residential alternatives for people with disabilities in Europe, this project showed that the problem of long-term institutional care for people with disabilities is prevalent in many European countries. The project’s work included the development of a set of goals and policy recommendations for the development of quality residential services for people with disabilities and highlighted the need for long-term action against institutionalisation. The project also proposed some key principles for ‘positive change’ which should underpin the development of community based services. These are: respect, choice, participation, independence and regional/local responsibility for people with disabilities.

- **Contact information**

For more information about ECCL, its members and activities, contact Ines Bulić, the ECCL Coordinator on the following address:

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<sup>3</sup> We use the term “de-institutionalisation” to mean the replacement of institutions for people with disabilities with comprehensive, quality community-based services.