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## **Retirement Homes: COVID-19 has aggravated an already critical situation Families of the elderly in retirement homes concerned**

**Brussels** - Euroconsumers' today announced the outcome of two studies that exclaimed the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on residents in retirement homes in Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The initial study took place at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 (11,399 respondents), with a follow up survey conducted in October 2020 (2,733 respondents). Study respondents of both surveys were of people with a relative who entered/been living in a home in the past 5 years.

The surveys found that a majority of the respondents were **already worried about the situation in retirement homes** in March 2020. That number only worsened over the intervening months due as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to spread across Europe. Additionally, respondents believe that retirement home residents' mental health and quality of life have suffered in particular, especially as additional lockdown measures were put in place. Specific results included:

1. **Homes managing the crisis:** Respondents were asked to evaluate homes' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The **majority was satisfied**, with 19% dissatisfied with how the pandemic was handled. The aspects that they were most satisfied about were the measures put in place to limit the spread of the disease and the daily care of the residents. They were least satisfied with the communication from the retirement home, the attention to mental health and the attention to leisure/occupational activities during the lockdown period.
2. **COVID deaths:** A significant number of respondents **do not know the cause of death of their relatives** in retirement homes. Among those who lost a relative during the period, 29% stated that the cause of death was unknown (from a high of 34% in Belgium, to a low of 19% in Portugal).
3. **PPE equipment shortage:** In March 2020, respondents reported the most **acute PPE equipment shortages** included COVID-19 testing kits (63%), face masks for staff members (53%), protective clothing for staff members (50%), and face masks for residents (49%). Overall, respondents did note that the supply had improved since the beginning of the pandemic (73% of respondents noted some shortages in March, against 52% in October).
4. **Serious underlying health conditions:** The number of retirement home residents with a serious health condition (among those that are still alive) **increased from 23% just before the lockdown (February 2020) to 35%** during the lockdown (March/April 2020), back to 33% in October 2020.

5. **Quality of life:** In all of the countries surveyed, respondents reported that the quality of life for their relative(s) deteriorated once they entered retirement homes. In addition, there has been a **sharp decrease in the physical and mental health of residents** as a result of the first lockdown (Spring 2020) and has unfortunately not improved since.
6. **Care too expensive:** In all countries, respondents evaluated the **monthly cost of retirement home care as being higher than the monthly income** of the resident, meaning that 68% of residents experienced a deficit every month.

The families of elderly relatives in retirement homes worry about their overall quality of life and in particular their mental health. The unique vulnerabilities that they are faced with have only been exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. As the Christmas period approaches, Euroconsumers calls on EU governments to pay particular attention to the mental well-being of our elderly generation.

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### **About Euroconsumers**

Gathering five national consumer organisations and giving voice to a total of more than 1.5 million people, Euroconsumers is the world's leading consumer cluster in innovative information, personalised services and defence of consumer's rights. Our organisations work together with BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation, and Consumers International to ensure consumers are safe, that markets are fair and benefit from honest relations with businesses and authorities.