

AMCRA, the Centre of Expertise on AntiMicrobial Consumption and Resistance in Animals in Belgium, was created in 2012 as a platform uniting the stakeholders involved in veterinary antimicrobial policy, sectors partners as well as the national competent authorities. AMCRA aims at safeguarding human and animal health and animal welfare by preventing a further increase of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through a rational reduction of antimicrobial use (AMU) in animals ([www.amcra.be](http://www.amcra.be)).

Since AMCRA has been launched, various actions have been taken to increase awareness and to inform about the risks associated with AMR. AMCRA published and continuously promotes guidelines, for veterinarians, about responsible use of antimicrobials. These AMCRA formularia are online available and provide an overview of preventive measures and, if AMU proves necessary, recommendations of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> choice antimicrobial therapy for the most occurring bacterial diseases in food-producing and companion animals ([www.e-formularium.be](http://www.e-formularium.be)). Additional supportive tools, for the veterinarian as well as the farmer, exist of advice-booklets describing optimal herd health and vaccination strategies in food producing animals. For the companion animal sector, awareness campaigns targeting both the veterinarian and the pet owner have been launched. Recently, informative posters and flyers with brief messages on the potential hazardous side effects of AMU have been edited and distributed to vet students and veterinarians in practice.

The Belgian strategy for combatting AMU/AMR in animals originated in 2014 when AMCRA established its 'Vision 2020' plan for a veterinary antimicrobial policy until 2020. The plan comprised three AMU reduction targets [50% less antimicrobials by 2020, 75% less of the critically important antimicrobials (CIAs: fluoroquinolones and 3G/4G cephalosporines) by 2020 and 50% less of feed medicated with antimicrobials by the end of 2017] and seven action points to achieve these targets. In 2016, the 'Vision 2020' was endorsed by the Belgian Federal Ministries of Health and Agriculture and most sector partners, through signing the 'Covenant between the federal government and the sector partners concerning the reduction of the AMU in veterinary medicine'. The national competent authorities further supported the reduction targets with the publication of a Royal Decree in July 2016 meant to regulate the use of these CIAs in food-producing animals. In February 2017, a Royal Decree introduced the compulsory registration in an online application of AMU at farms with pigs, veal calves, broilers and laying hens.

Besides the extensive communication and awareness activities, AMCRA is responsible for the analysis of farm-level antimicrobial use data collected by governmental and private data collection systems. Thereto, AMCRA has developed the methodology for benchmarking farmers and veterinarians, creating the conditions for evaluating and adjusting AMU at farm level.

The sector-based approach advocated by AMCRA constitutes a unique initiative in Europe. Moreover, it has been a success so far. In Belgium, total veterinary antimicrobial use has been reduced with 26% since 2011. In particular the use of feed medicated with antimicrobials was reduced by 66% and contemporarily the use of the CIA's was reduced by 86%.

In the near future species-specific reduction targets will be fixed, based on AMU data collected per animal sector, to guarantee commitments of all stakeholders in veterinary medicine after 2020.