



Press Release

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Members of the European Parliament Discuss Achieving Heart Health in Europe

Brussels, 9 December 2009 - Members of the European Parliament Heart Group (MEP HG) meet today, in Brussels, with the Cardiology profession and representatives of national Heart Foundations to evaluate the achievements at EU level in combating Cardiovascular Disease (CVD), and to reveal the need for further action.

With the title '*Achieving Heart Health in Europe: Why the European Parliament Matters*', the meeting is the first since the European elections in June this year. During the 2004-2009 term, the MEP Heart Group was the largest forum on health in the European Parliament. The group resumes now its activities which endeavour to raise heart health as a priority on the EU political agenda. CVD is the number one killer in Europe, accounting for over 2 million deaths in the EU alone and costing the EU over 190 billion Euros each year. (1)

Mr Dirk Sterckx MEP, Co-chair of the MEP HG, believes that "the European Union has a major role to play in fostering heart health promotion and developing wide-ranging prevention strategies. The European Parliament has set the example with the 2007 *Resolution on action to tackle cardiovascular disease* (2). However, the recent declining trends in CVD deaths in Europe are now slowing down. This is very worrying; it represents an alarm call to the European Commission and the Council."

"The EU cannot turn its back on CVD", agrees Linda McAvan MEP, Co-chair of the MEP HG. "Evidence does exist that prevention brings significant health gains. It is therefore the task of decision makers at European and national level to ensure that effective policies supporting prevention are put in place."

"CVD is currently THE public health challenge in Europe", says Prof. Simon Capewell, Professor of Clinical Epidemiology, Liverpool University, UK. "There are widening gaps both between and within Member States. CVD mortality rates have been decreasing in the past 30 years but they are now flattening. This is extremely frustrating because 80% of premature CVD deaths can be prevented by tackling the major risk factors, diet and smoking. A comprehensive European heart health strategy addressing health promotion and disease prevention is a moral responsibility for policymakers."

Significant policy developments addressing cardiovascular disease have taken place in Europe in the last decade. These include the Council Conclusions to promote heart health (adopted in 2004), the European Heart Health Charter (launched in 2007), and the European Parliament Resolution on action to tackle cardiovascular disease (adopted with a large majority in July 2007). Despite this, a tangible European strategy to address CVD is still non-existent. The MEP HG is calling for action from the European Commission and Member States to fill the gap. We urgently need to address what should be the Number 1 public health priority in Europe.



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Notes to Editors:

CVD is the main cause of death and disability in Europe and accounts for over 2 million deaths in the EU each year, nearly half of all deaths in Europe. In response to this, the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and the European Heart Network (EHN) are totally committed to identifying specific areas of policies and public health interventions which can contribute to preventing avoidable deaths and disabilities from CVD.

The MEP HG provides MEPs an opportunity to generate dialogue, outreach and activities at EU and Member State level. It is made up of MEPs who have an interest in addressing CVD in the EU and in contributing to initiatives which aim to reduce the burden of this disease. Several of its supporters have a medical background and/or are members of the EP Health Working Group but accession to the Group is not restricted to these categories.

The European Society of Cardiology (ESC) represents 62,000 cardiology professionals across Europe and the Mediterranean. Its mission is to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in Europe. www.escardio.org

The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and other concerned non-governmental organisations throughout Europe. www.ehnheart.org

References:

- (1) European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics 2008, European Heart Network.
- (2) EP resolution (2007): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=EN&reference=B6-0277/2007>