



Press release

Embargoed for release:  
27 April 2010 00:01 GMT (London)

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## **Europe's politicians put women on 'red alert' for their risks of cardiovascular disease**

### **MEP meeting to address Europe's number 1 cause of female death**

Although cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death for women in Europe, and more women die from CVD than from all cancers combined, women - and many of their physicians - remain largely unaware of their risk of developing CVD. Importantly, this is a risk which increases dramatically with age.

Women's risk of CVD is the theme of a meeting today (27 April) of the MEP Heart Group, reuniting MEPs aiming to promote measures to lower the incidence of CVD in Europe and raise its prevention and treatment higher up the EU political agenda. There are currently 50 MEP members of the group - one of the largest health forums in the European Parliament - and they are led by two co-chairs, Linda McAvan MEP (S&D - UK) and Dirk Sterckx MEP (ALDE - BE), who will each speak at the meeting. Eva-Britt Svensson MEP (GUE/NGL - SW), Chair of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) Committee, will also address the meeting on the role of the European Parliament in the promotion of women's health.

The meeting, titled Red Alert for Women's Hearts, will take place today at the European Parliament and has been organised with the support of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and European Heart Network (EHN).

Behind the MEPs' discussion lie the stark facts and figures relating to CVD in European women(1):

\* CVD (principally coronary heart disease and stroke) is responsible for 54% of all deaths in women across Europe (and 43% of all deaths in men) killing more people than all cancers combined

\* More than one in six women (and one in ten men) will die from stroke, the second single most common cause of death in Europe (after coronary heart disease)

Linda McAvan MEP states: "European Institutions, national health care authorities and regulatory agencies should promote actions to ensure that cardiovascular health for women is properly considered and that gender-specific aspects are addressed in scientific research on CVD."



Dirk Sterckx MEP adds: "Greater efforts to prevent CVD are necessary. The promotion of smoking prevention and cessation in women is one important example where the EU can make a difference. Smoking bans in public places, including bars and restaurants, are certainly a step in the right direction."

Eva Britt Svensson MEP, chair of the EP Women's Committee, says: "The EU cannot turn its back on women's health. There is evidence that CVD is a major hazard for women and that significant health gains are reachable through prevention and specific research. It is therefore the task of decision makers at European and national levels to ensure that effective policies tackling these important matters for CVD are put in place."

One other contentious subject which the MEPs will address is the apparent imbalance in how men and women with CVD are treated. For example, another speaker, Professor Marco Stramba-Badiale, from the Istituto Auxologico Italiano, author of the report "Red Alert for Women's Hearts" in the framework of the EuroHeart project (2), has shown that women have been - and are still - under-represented in many of the landmark clinical trials of CVD therapies. "Gender differences have been identified in the clinical presentation of CVD, as well as in their treatment. Their understanding may improve the clinical management of CVD and, in the future, develop possible gender specific diagnostic and therapeutic strategies," he says.

Helen Alderson, CEO of the World Heart Federation emphasises the importance of campaigns such as Go Red for Women, the first international campaign dedicated to education about and prevention of heart disease and stroke in women: "This campaign not only helps to raise awareness that women are at risk of CVD but also aims to mobilise legislators to implement policy changes at a national level so that women are diagnosed and adequately treated, ultimately reducing the global burden of CVD."

#### REFERENCES

1. European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics 2008, European Heart Network, Brussels
2. EuroHeart is a joint project of the European Heart Network and European Society of Cardiology, co-funded by the European Union. It aims to strengthen cross-sector cooperation; obtain comprehensive comparable information on policies and actions on cardiovascular health promotion and disease prevention; improve awareness, diagnosis and treatment of women with CVD across Europe; and create a level playing field by introducing national versions of CVD guidelines.

#### MORE INFORMATION

About the MEP Heart Group [www.mepheartgroup.eu](http://www.mepheartgroup.eu)  
About the European Society of Cardiology [www.escardio.org](http://www.escardio.org)  
About the European Heart Network [www.ehnheart.org](http://www.ehnheart.org)  
About the World Heart Federation [www.worldheart.org](http://www.worldheart.org)