

Press Release

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Heart, kidney, diabetes and cancer MEP groups league against chronic disease to seek European commitment

In an unprecedented effort to bring prevention of chronic diseases¹ to the top of the EU agenda, the MEP Heart Group², the MEP Group for Kidney Health³, the EU Diabetes Working Group⁴ and MEPs Against Cancer⁵ organise a joint meeting today in the European Parliament, together with representatives of health professionals and health activists at European level.

"If we don't address these chronic diseases urgently, they threaten the "Europe 2020 strategy", especially the goal to have 75% of the working population employed and productive" says Linda McAvan, MEP and co-chair of the MEP Heart Group. Most of these chronic diseases are treatable but not curable, which explains why they generate an enormous financial burden due to treatment and care costs and loss of economic productivity.

"Chronic diseases are largely preventable and in this respect the European Parliament has a major role to play" says Frieda Brepoels, chair of the MEP Group for Kidney Health. In a joint statement issued at the end of the meeting, MEPs call upon the competent authorities in the member states to urgently develop and improve policies aiming at tackling chronic diseases. "A higher investment in prevention is needed", continues Frieda Brepoels, "in particular by raising awareness about common risk factors and promoting healthy lifestyles".

Four major health determinants - tobacco, poor diet, alcohol and lack of physical activity - account for most chronic illness and death in Europe. Addressing chronic diseases will allow Europeans to live longer and healthier lives, stay longer in the workforce and

¹ Chronic diseases include heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, kidney disease, cancers, respiratory and liver diseases

² www.mepheartgroup.eu

³ http://www.ekha.eu/00031/Activities/MEP_Group_for_Kidney_Health.aspx

⁴ <http://www.idf.org/node/1149?unode=214D5AF8-E9CD-BC78-7374160131EF3EAE>

⁵ <http://www.europecancerleagues.eu/component/content/article/3-highlights/192-meps-against-cancer-ii-meeting-29-september.html>

contribute to reversing the alarming negative labour force growth which is predicted for 2020.⁶

High tobacco and alcohol taxes, smoke free environment, good nutrition labelling which helps consumers make healthy choices and measures to prioritise the needs of pedestrians and cyclists over those of motorists in urban areas are but some of the few measures that politicians should put in place.

Alojz Peterle, Member of the European Parliament and President of MEPs Against Cancer (MAC), one of the co-organisers of the event said: 'We urge MEPs, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and national governments to work together to tackle the problem of chronic diseases. It is only by working in partnership that we will be able to put in place effective Europe-wide policies aimed at preventing these conditions that cause so much suffering and death each year. Prevention is undoubtedly cheaper than disease management and treatment and, therefore, it makes economic sense to pursue these policies now at a time when many national governments are having to curb their expenditure.'

The co-chairs of the four MEP Groups strongly supports the initiative taken by the trio of the European Union presidencies to give priority to the prevention of chronic diseases and support the initiative of the Belgian Council presidency to raise awareness on the burden of chronic diseases at its upcoming conference of 19 – 20 October.

The discussions on primary prevention on non-communicable chronic diseases in Europe were inspired by the recommendations contained in a policy paper recently published by the Chronic Disease Alliance⁷, a coalition of 10 non-for-profit European organisations representing over 100.000 health professionals, who have joined forces to put the case for immediate action to reverse the alarming rise in chronic diseases.

The organisers of this MEP meeting call upon the competent authorities in all Member States to commit to reducing the burden of chronic disease. "Investment in interventions to control the burden of chronic diseases will bring appreciable economic and social benefits to society", concludes Dirk Sterckx, MEP and co-chair of the MEP Heart Group.

⁶ 2009 Ageing report : Economic and budgetary projections for the EU – 27 Member States (2008 – 2060), European Commission Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs , 2009

⁷ <http://www.escardio.org/ABOUT/WHAT/ADVOCACY/Pages/Chronic-Disease-Alliance.aspx>

They also called all EU head of states to contribute to and to attend the United Nations high-level meeting of the General Assembly in September 2011 on the prevention and control of Non-Communicable Diseases.

Note to editors:

Chronic non-communicable diseases kill 86% of all people in the WHO European Region. Cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, diabetes, kidney and liver diseases account for more than 40% the disease burden in Europe.⁸ Heart disease, stroke and diabetes alone are projected to lead to loss of national income in the billions, e.g. almost \$33 billion in the United Kingdom (from 2005 to 2015).⁹

The Chronic Disease alliance consists of the organisations mentioned below:

About the European Association for the Study of the Liver

EASL is the leading European scientific society involved in promoting research and education in hepatology. EASL attracts the foremost hepatology experts as members and has an impressive track record in promoting research in liver disease, supporting wider education and promoting changes in European liver policy.

www.easl.eu

About the European CanCer Organisation

Following the philosophy that every cancer patient deserves the best, ECCO focuses on creating awareness of patients' needs and wishes, stimulating progressive thinking in Cancer policy, training and education, and encouraging European cancer research and its application through the organisation of international multidisciplinary conferences including the premier European cancer meetings: the ECCO – ESMO Multidisciplinary Cancer Congresses.

www.ecco-org.eu

About the European Heart Network

The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and like-minded nongovernmental organisations throughout Europe. EHN has member organisations in 26 countries. EHN plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular diseases, in particular heart disease and stroke, through advocacy, networking, education and patient support, so that they are no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe.

www.ehnheart.org

About the European Kidney Health Alliance

The European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA) is an Alliance of not-for-profit organisations who represent the key stakeholders in kidney health issues in Europe. EKHA takes a multidisciplinary approach involving patients and their families, doctors and nurses, researchers and other healthcare professionals who work cooperatively for a European health environment in which there is a sustained decrease in kidney disease and its consequences.

www.ekha.eu

About the European Respiratory Society

⁸ Gaining Health - The European Strategy for the Prevention and Control on Noncommunicable Diseases. World Health Organization. 2006

⁹ Preventing Chronic Diseases – a vital investment. World Health Organization. 2005

The ERS, European Respiratory Society, is a professional, medical organisation with more than 10,000 members in over 100 countries representing medical and scientific experts in the field of respiratory medicine and lung science. Its mission is to promote lung health through research, knowledge sharing, and medical education.

www.ersnet.org

About the European Society of Cardiology

The ESC unites over 62,000 cardiology professionals from across Europe and the Mediterranean, with the mission of reducing the burden of cardiovascular disease in Europe through education, congresses, surveys on cardiovascular diseases and the publishing of scientific materials, including journals and Clinical Practice Guidelines.

www.escardio.org

About the European Society of Hypertension

The main purpose of the European Society of Hypertension (ESH) is to provide a stable and organised European platform for scientific exchange in hypertension. The objectives of ESH are to promote, endorse and organise activities involved with the continuing medical education in the field of hypertension and associated cardiovascular diseases.

www.eshonline.org

About the European Society for Medical Oncology

The European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) is the leading European professional organisation committed to advancing the specialty of medical oncology and promoting a multidisciplinary approach to cancer treatment and care. ESMO's mission is to advance cancer care and cure through fostering and disseminating good science that leads to better medicine and determines best practice.

www.esmo.org

About the Federation of European Nurses in Diabetes

FEND has established a unique voice for nurses working in the field of diabetes care, research and education in Europe. Its mission statement is to promote the delivery of evidence based care for people with diabetes throughout Europe.

www.fend.org

About the International Diabetes Federation - Europe

IDF-Europe is the European Regional section of the International Diabetes Federation. Its constituents are the member associations of the national diabetes organisations (representing both health care professionals and patients & carers) from 45 European countries. Within the EU there are over 30 million people with diabetes, it is increasing at an alarming rate and this number is predicted to exceed 50 million by 2030. IDF-Europe aims to encourage the prevention, the earlier diagnosis, better management and education of diabetes.

www.idf.org/idf-european-region