

MEP Heart Group Statement

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The EU funding landscape: promoting research and innovation for cardiovascular health

Substantial progress in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease (CVD) has led to a false optimism that cardiovascular disease is no longer a public health priority. Despite a period of decline in cardiovascular mortality and a prolongation of life expectancy, cardiovascular disease is still the leading cause of death and a major societal burden.

The perception that cardiovascular disease is only associated with the elderly population is wrong. CVD impacts people of all ages and substantially contributes to premature death. Around 20% of all premature deaths (before the age of 65) in the EU are caused by CVD.

An additional concern is the increasing number of people living with debilitating chronic diseases such as heart failure and vascular dementia. The pandemic has further aggravated the burden of CVD, leaving many people with new cardiovascular conditions after recovering from COVID-19.

Preventing, detecting and diagnosing these conditions early and managing them effectively when they occur is essential. However, there are still many research areas being unexplored in cardiovascular disease and its biological determinants. As most cardiac conditions cannot be cured, understanding their molecular causes and developing personalised approaches will provide new treatment pathways for the many patients affected. Very few innovative cardiovascular therapies have been developed in recent years despite the many unmet patient needs. A clear and evidence-based understanding of the precise disease mechanisms is needed to unlock innovation and allow novel medicine compounds to enter the development pipeline.

In parallel, more high-quality data from clinical investigations, clinical trials and registries is needed to better guide treatment decisions, assist in the implementation of care programmes and support further research. In the decade of e-health and digital transformation, novel bio-monitoring applications, safe and efficient data sharing and innovative diagnostic algorithms offer great opportunities.

There are promising options to fight the unacceptably high burden of cardiovascular disease. However, to untap their potential more EU funding is needed. With the start of two new EU programmes, Horizon Europe and EU4Health, the time to act is now. The combined support of these two programmes can act as an important catalyst to leverage the opportunities that research and innovation can offer to improve citizens' cardiovascular health and address the burden of cardiovascular disease.

The MEP Heart Group calls on the European Commission and the Programme Committees of Horizon Europe and EU4Health to prioritise areas of unmet needs in cardiovascular disease in the next work programmes.

Specifically, we call for the following priorities to be funded in the two programmes:

Horizon Europe

Support investment in cardiovascular research, **from basic to translational clinical research**, allowing for new discoveries that can significantly reduce the burden of cardiovascular diseases and consequently improve the lives of millions of people in the EU.

Address the innovation gap: in the framework of the **new Public Private Partnership on Health Innovation, design a partnership on cardiovascular disease** focusing on the complete patient pathway. From prevention and early detection, to accessing care and treatment, and to improving quality of life.

Harness the power of **real-world data**. Support the building of digital infrastructure systems to ensure that high-quality, standardised data can be used effectively to support personalised clinical decision-making.

EU4Health

Integrate cardiovascular registries, such as EuroHeart¹, as a use case under **the European Health Data Space initiative**. Structured and standardised real world data is essential for better research and evidence-based policymaking. The EuroHeart project aims to unify patient data across Europe through the use of common datasets.

Encourage joint actions for the early detection of cardiovascular disease led by Member States. **Comprehensive national CVD strategies are lacking**. There is a great need to set effective policy interventions in the continuum of care to reduce the incidence of cardiovascular disease.

Leverage the potential of the Pharmaceutical Strategy to accelerate innovation in the development of high quality, safe, and effective cardiovascular medicines, harnessing the benefits of digital technologies. Cardiovascular disease lacks new treatments and is in great need of novel medicine compounds to enter the development pipeline.

¹ EuroHeart: European Unified Registries on Heart Care Evaluation and Randomized Trials, <https://academic.oup.com/eurheartj/article/40/33/2745/5556633>