

## Chronic Disease Alliance urges EU action on chronic disease

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In June the Chronic Disease Alliance presented a document to **John Dalli**, the EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy setting out their strategy for tackling chronic diseases. The Chronic Disease Alliance, representing:

- European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL),
- European CanCer Organisation (ECCO),
- European Heart Network (EHN),
- European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA),
- European Respiratory Society (ERS),
- European Society of Cardiology (ESC)
- European Society of Hypertension (ESH),
- European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO),
- Federation of European Nurses in Diabetes (FEND),
- International Diabetes Federation – European Region (IDF Europe),

is campaigning for the introduction of innovative measures addressing tobacco, poor diet, alcohol and lack of physical activity to prevent chronic diseases and protect the future health of the European population.

“We firmly believe that investment in healthy lifestyles is the only sustainable way forward to prevent chronic disease,” says Professor **Lars Rydén**, chair of the ESC Prevention Group and the driving force behind the creation of the group. “The diseases represented in the Alliance have striking commonalities and interactions, underlining the fact that there are issues common to chronic diseases which can be addressed by the same policy measures.”

The document, titled “A Unified Prevention Approach”<sup>(1)</sup>, brings together the long-term scientific knowledge and research of leading European organisations in the fields of health promotion, disease prevention and health care. “This year billions will be spent on the treatment of avoidable chronic disease in Europe, and millions of lives will be unnecessarily lost or impaired. If radical action is not taken now, this costly burden will continue to increase,” says Rydén, from the Karolinska Institutet (Stockholm, Sweden).

“This unique alliance of medical professionals is committed to taking action on their belief that prevention is better than cure. Working side-by-side with decision-makers will secure the most cost-effective and long-term strategy for a better and healthier future for the entire European population,” says **David Kerr**, President of ESMO, Professor of Cancer Therapeutics at the University of Oxford.

Chronic non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes, kidney disease, cancers, respiratory and liver diseases, account for 86% of deaths in the WHO European Region (2). Furthermore, up to 40% of the EU population aged over 15 reports having a long standing health problem and two out of three people who have reached retirement age have at least two chronic conditions.

“A Unified Prevention Approach” stresses that while the individual human costs cannot be overstated, chronic disease also places an unsustainable financial burden on health care budgets.

“A key message is that health equals wealth and that investing in health ultimately will lead to improvements in the European economy,” says Rydén.

**Recommendations in the document**, based on scientific evidence and experience, include:

- **Tobacco:** Ensure that taxation on tobacco is harmonised at high levels across Europe; adopt standardised packaging for cigarettes with 80% of the package being devoted to pictorial health warnings; ban internet sales of tobacco and cigarette vending machines.

- **Nutrition:** Make efforts to reduce the fat, sugar and salt content a key priority; ban the addition of industrially produced trans fats to foods; introduce a mandatory traffic light colour coding system (using red, orange and green labels to show whether products contain high, medium or low levels of harmful nutrients) to facilitate consumer education; increase supply and access to affordable fresh fruit and vegetables, and EU measures to prohibit the marketing of unhealthy food to children.
- **Physical activity:** Set urban planning standards to prioritise non motorised transport and for recreational areas encouraging physical activity, give children access to periods of physical activity each day at school, and improve facilities for physical activity in school.
- **Alcohol consumption:** Create educational programmes to reinforce awareness of problems created by excessive alcohol consumption to ensure EU populations are better informed and investment in the development and implementation of alcohol dependence programmes. In addition, ban alcohol advertising, promotion and sponsorship of events via TV radio and sports programmes and ensure the introduction of uniform minimum EU taxes.

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“Further to successful discussions during the last Chronic Disease Alliance meeting, we are looking forward to the EU Health Commissioner’s recommendation on actions to support public health strategies and mobilise political support to curb health and economic burden linked to chronic conditions,” said Professor **Mark Thursz**, Vice Secretary of EASL and Professor of Hepatology at Imperial College (London, UK).

In welcoming this initiative, **Chris Delicata**, President of IDF European Region, based in Brussels, said, “Increasing the opportunities for people to live healthier lifestyles will assist in reducing the serious complications of chronic conditions.”

## Notes to editor

### ***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](http://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](http://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 non-governmental 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](http://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](http://www.ekha.eu)

**About the European Respiratory Society**

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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.idf.org/idf-european-region)

**References**

(1) On June 10, 2010 representatives of the Chronic Diseases Alliance presented "A Unified Prevention Approach: the case for urgent political action to reduce the social and economic burden of chronic disease through prevention" to EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli in Brussels.

(2) World Health Organisation – Europe

<http://www.euro.who.int/>