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fighting heart disease
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Press release

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Non communicable diseases at the centre of UN discussions

The European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA)¹ welcomes the UN High Level Meeting on Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to address the world biggest killers. “It is a memorable day in the history of public health. Discussing non communicable diseases at the UN table gives a strong sense of the burden it represents to human kind and the recognition that NCDs is a challenge for all nations in the world²”, declared Professor Michel Komajda, President of the European Society of Cardiology, an active member of the ECDA.

Indeed, non-communicable diseases – a group of conditions that includes cardiovascular diseases, cancer, kidney disease, liver disease, diabetes mellitus, chronic respiratory disease and musculoskeletal conditions remain the leading cause of death in Europe, accounting for 86% of deaths and 77% of the disease burden in the WHO European Region.

Over the last year, the European Chronic Disease Alliance mobilised European and national leaders, calling for a strong final declaration on the fight of non communicable diseases.

The ECDA had high expectations, in particular on clear and ambitious targets that nations could adhere to. Unfortunately, the proposal to reduce non communicable disease by 25% by 2025 did not survive the negotiations.

Nor did the proposals on salt reduction or on the accountability of member states, that the ECDA strongly advocated for in Europe³. In addition, calls for enforceable targets to limit the harmful consumption of alcohol were also ignored”.

“What gets measured gets done”, said Susanne Løgstrup, quoting the Director-General of WHO from the European Heart Network, one of the founding members of the ECDA. “Failing to have measurable and timely targets in the final declaration is a bitter disappointment”.

The ECDA will now look at how to implement the UN Political Declaration, in particular at EU level.

“We must emphasise the role of the scientist in measuring the success of the UN objectives. We have to work harder to collect data and improve monitoring and surveillance so that what gets done to reduce NCDs gets measured. We need to have the right methods, the right tools to do this, through academic science and methodology. Scientific and medical societies are best placed

to do this and we must engage in this process”, says Marc Decramer, President of the European Respiratory Society, an ECDA member.

A more ambitious approach was favoured by Members of the European Parliament last week, with the vote of a motion for a resolution⁴ that calls for the urgent adoption of NCDs prevention measures across Europe.

We will continue our efforts to promote a Europe less vulnerable to chronic diseases and to disseminate our policy recommendations, much of them only requiring simple and cheap changes with substantial impact on the diseases burden.

Notes for editors

1- Members of the European Chronic Disease Alliance are:

- 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)

2- Chronic non-communicable diseases cause 86% of all deaths in Europe

- upto 40% of the EU population aged over 15 report a long-standing health problem related to chronic non-communicable diseases
- upto 80% of health-care expenses are allocated to chronic diseases – in other words cost of chronic non-communicable diseases are in the billions of euros every year; cardiovascular diseases alone are estimated to cost the EU economy over 192 billion euros every year
- 4 factors account for a majority of the burden of chronic non-communicable diseases: tobacco, poor diets, alcohol and lack of physical activity
- the majority of chronic non-communicable diseases can be prevented
- population wide NCD prevention is consistently cost-saving

3-<http://www.escardio.org/about/what/advocacy/Documents/Chronic-disease-alliance-Final.pdf>

4- Motion for a resolution on the European Union position and commitment in advance to the UN high-level meeting on the prevention and control of NCDs, 12.9.2011, B7-0488/2011