

MEPs and health professionals call for urgent action to tackle chronic diseases

October 5 2010

Members of the European Parliament are calling on the Presidency of the EU and Member States to tackle urgently the problem of chronic non-communicable diseases that are responsible for 86% of all deaths in the WHO European Region. Their call is supported by an alliance of European health professionals, including ECCO – the European Cancer Organisation – and ESMO – the European Society for Medical Oncology.

After a meeting later today (Tuesday) between MEPs and the Chronic Disease Alliance of ten not-for-profit European organisations that represent over 100,000 health professionals, the MEPs will issue a statement urging action to develop and improve policies on the four main risk factors for chronic diseases: tobacco, poor diet, alcohol and lack of physical activity.

The Chronic Disease Alliance will present their report, "A unified prevention approach – the case for urgent political action to reduce the social and economic burden of chronic disease through prevention", to the joint meeting of the MEPs Against Cancer, the MEP Heart Group, the MEP Group for Kidney Health, and the EU Diabetes Working Group.

The report recommends the following:

- Action on tobacco at EU level should include: harmonisation of

taxation across the EU; standardised packaging with all branding removed; a ban on internet sales; that all regulatory, scientific and advisory capacity should be independent; complete disclosure of tobacco components.

- Action on tobacco at national level should include: fully implementing the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC); banning tobacco advertising; comprehensive ban on smoking in all public and workplaces; increasing tobacco tax above inflation; banning cigarette machines.
- Action on nutrition at EU level should include: European Commission to set a firm agenda on levels of fat, sugar and salt in food; EU ban on transfats; mandatory food labelling with traffic light coding; integrated food and agriculture policy; prohibiting all marketing of unhealthy food to children.
- Action on nutrition at national level should include: controlling the provision and sale of fatty snacks, confectionary and sweet drinks in public institutions; introducing subsidies on healthy foods to improve patterns of food consumption.
- Action on physical activity at EU level should include: intensifying the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on the effectiveness of interventions; monitoring EU citizen's participation in physical activity through regular survey.
- Action on physical activity at national level should include: prioritising non-motorised transport and recreational areas to encourage physical activity; encouraging in-school and after school sport; monitoring child and adolescent growth.
- Action on alcohol at EU level should include: a ban on alcohol

advertising, promotion and sponsorship of events via media or sports; a uniform EU tax rates for all alcoholic drinks; a restriction of advertising for alcohol products; reinforcing awareness.

- Action on alcohol at national level should include: reducing the availability of alcohol by reducing the number of outlets; developing help and care against alcohol dependence; training primary care staff to recognise signs of alcohol-use disorders; reducing legal alcohol concentration in the blood to 0.2g/L for all vehicle drivers.

The Chronic Disease Alliance and the MEPs are supporting the initiative by the Belgian Presidency of the EU to focus on the issue of chronic disease prevention at its Ministerial Conference on October 20, 2010.

Professor Michael Baumann, president of ECCO – the European CanCer Organisation – which is part of the Alliance, said: "Chronic diseases, including many cancers, are often treatable but not always curable. They represent a major burden, not just in terms of the problems they cause to individual patients, but also in terms of the financial burdens on patients and on national governments through treatment costs and loss of economic activity. The four main causes of chronic disease – tobacco, poor diet, lack of physical activity and alcohol consumption – are all preventable, yet 97% of health expenditure currently goes on treatment and only 3% is spent on prevention. ECCO fully supports all of the actions suggested in the report from the Chronic Disease Alliance for tackling chronic diseases, and we urge the EU and Member States to implement its recommendations in full."

Professor David Kerr, president of the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO), which is also a member of the Alliance, said: "Chronic diseases, which often share common causes, are preventable

tragedies for every person affected by them. By taking action now to prevent them, the EU and national governments would save lives as well as money. For the first time ever, leading health experts in cancer, cardiovascular, kidney, liver and respiratory diseases, diabetes and hypertension, have come together to present a unifying and integrated message to national governments that prevention through life-style changes can make a significant impact on a group of diseases that will affect two thirds of people by the time they reach retirement age."

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 first joint meeting of the MEPs Against Cancer, the MEP Heart Group, the MEP Group for Kidney Health, and the EU Diabetes Working Group will take place on Tuesday 5 October, between 18.30-20.30 hrs (CEST) at the European Parliament in Room A3G - 2. It is organised by MEPS Frieda Brepoels, Simon Busuttil, Baroness Sarah Ludford, Linda McAvan, Marisa Matias, Alojz Peterle, Christel Schaldemose and Dirk Sterckx.

Provided by ECCO-the European CanCer Organisation

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