

Good health is a sine qua non for the EU

A recent Eurobarometer survey on the Future of Europe in Social Issues showed that the majority (60%) of respondents “support more European-level decision-making in dealing with health and social security issues”¹. Most citizens want a more social Europe, placing the health of the population as a top priority. Good health plays a central role in building inclusive, competitive and sustainable societies and economies. It contributes to growth and wealth, reduces avoidable costs of care and contributing to a productive workforce.

The high prevalence of chronic diseases is a key health challenge that Europe faces today. Every year in the EU, 550,000 people of working age die prematurely from four major chronic diseases (cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease and diabetes)², carrying a significant societal and economic cost amounting to a €115-billion annual loss every year according to the OECD. One-third

of the European population aged 15 and over lives with a chronic disease³, affecting people of working-age (23.5%) as well as younger generations. These data clearly point to the need for effective action which will also contribute to reaching the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) n°3 and especially its target to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by one-third.

We acknowledge the ongoing efforts made by the current European Commission to address chronic diseases, but in light of the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases rising with the ageing population, we highly recommend that the current and next Commission recognise health as an objective in its own right within the Commission's 2019-2024 Strategy. This Strategy shall contain specific objectives on chronic diseases; and step up efforts to dedicate the necessary resources.

In particular, we call for the following priority actions:

A structured EU framework on chronic diseases

To ensure consolidated, coordinated action, the European Commission, EU Member States and stakeholders need a structured EU framework. Therefore, we call on the next European Commission to adopt a comprehensive EU framework on chronic diseases, developed in partnership with national competent authorities, experts, patient organisations and with the involvement of the non-health sectors including environment and agriculture. Actions implemented under this framework shall be jointly financed by the various existing and future EU funding instruments including the Health Programme, the EU Social Fund, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, the Erasmus programme but also the European Fund for Strategic Investments (ESFI) to mobilise private investment and allow actions on the different aspects of the challenge. Such a multiple funding mechanism will effectively operationalise a “health-in-all-policies” approach.

A European Chronic Disease Awareness Day

A European Awareness Day on Chronic Diseases should be set up to enhance concrete action, linking with initiatives at the national level. It would act as an overall framework for coordinated action at EU, national and local level and a pillar to incentivise Member States and stakeholders to raise awareness, educate and initiate new programmes to prevent, control and treat chronic diseases throughout Europe.

A meaningful, ambitious Sixth Reflection Paper “Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030”

The Sixth Reflection Paper “Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030” should address health and in particular the chronic disease challenge. Any debate on the Future of Europe cannot underestimate the importance of a healthy EU workforce and human capital: “the wellbeing of our

planet and its people should be the basis for the vision of Europe”⁴. A new subgroup on “health and social affairs” should be created within the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on the Implementation of the SDGs to advise and input to the paper.

Targeted funding and investment to address chronic diseases

Investment in chronic diseases should cover:

Prevention and early detection

Prevention is essential to address the growing incidence of chronic diseases in Europe and minimising related societal challenges. Important risk factors are socio-economic and lifestyle-related and can be addressed by measures targeting the population at large. Social and environmental determinants of health - root causes of the diseases - include unhealthy diets, tobacco consumption and harmful use of alcohol, physical inactivity, and air pollution. Regulatory measures should be taken when necessary and where evidence shows that self-regulation is not sufficient. Investment should focus on preventive measures and ensure a shift towards prevention-oriented healthcare systems, as well as actions aimed at early detection.

Treatment and care

The organisation and delivery of healthcare plays an essential part in chronic disease management and recovery. Stronger primary healthcare systems to ensure early detection and treatment are essential. Integrated primary and specialist care, multidisciplinary care (including psychological, social, employment activation and return-to-work support) need to be implemented in all healthcare settings. This allows to consider the care pathway in its full dimension and break silos between

1. Special Eurobarometer 467, September - October 2017 “Future of Europe – Social issues” Report.
2. OECD/EU (2016), Health at a Glance: Europe 2016 - State of Health in the EU Cycle, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI:10.1787/9789264265552-en
3. Ibid reference 2.
4. Jacques Delors, Restoring a Europe built on values for its youth, Article in Euractiv, September 2016

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disciplines and sectors, but also beyond the healthcare settings. Successful integration of care requires patient centricity, a multidisciplinary team approach, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, good communication, clear guidelines/protocols on management/follow-up care, rapid access back to secondary care and adequate IT systems. Strengthening integrated primary and secondary care will enable earlier detection of diseases and result in economic benefits with long and short-term cost-savings.

Further, rehabilitation programmes are key in supporting chronic disease patients in managing their conditions. They improve functional capacity, recovery and psychological well-being of individuals and it has been demonstrated that they are cost saving and cost-effective. Improving and further developing the implementation of rehabilitation programmes should be an essential part of EU and national healthcare strategies and should be seen as an investment in health.

Research and innovation

A meaningful response to chronic diseases cannot go without sufficient investment in research and innovation. While the EU is negotiating the next Multi-annual Financial Framework and the next EU Framework Programme for Research & Innovation, investment in health should increase to allow greater understanding of the diseases, scientific knowledge on risk factors and options to develop innovative treatments and cure. In addition, greater research efforts should be directed to evaluating the effectiveness of existing disease prevention programmes

and activities. The context and circumstances in which the research has been carried out should be considered, to ensure that country/ context tailored actions are performed where necessary. Research should also be fostered on integration of care for chronic diseases across the EU.

Social inclusion and workforce participation

While measures are taken towards a Europe free of chronic diseases, it is of utmost importance to ensure that patients and people with chronic conditions can participate fully in society. Stigma and limited public knowledge on chronic diseases worsen the impact of the conditions on patients and families by preventing people from seeking treatment and causing social exclusion, including on the labour market. Addressing the employment and re(integration) into work challenge should be a priority from a health, social, economic approach and economic approach. The EU must ensure an improved employability and participation into the labour market of people with chronic diseases, respecting the ability and wishes of the individual. Policy provisions should focus on the individual's capacity to work to create inclusive labour markets, and acknowledge the valuable contribution to the European workforce that patients can make.

Improving Europe-wide access to healthcare is also an important factor. Inequalities in access to care needs to be further tackled within EU regions, countries and population groups to ensure they do not hamper efforts to reduce the impact of chronic diseases.

The European Commission and EU Member States have committed to deliver on the UN SDGs in the EU. Further investment in chronic disease prevention and management will be key to achieve them, in particular goal n°3. It will simultaneously contribute to the implementation of other SDGs and in particular goal n°8 on sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; goal n° 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; goal n°10 on reducing inequality within and among countries; goal n°11 on sustainable cities and communities; and goal n° 13 on climate action.

The EU was built on common values which place its citizens at the centre. It has been a pioneer in resolving some major challenges but sustainable development in the EU cannot happen without full integration of the social dimension. Health threats and especially chronic diseases should receive the same level of attention as areas such as the circular economy

and sustainable finance, and we believe that the European Union has all the means and the legal competence to act just as well on this front. Let the EU response to chronic diseases be an example of "an innovative and European way" whereby EU efforts create economic growth and bring direct benefits to our society and citizens.

In the context of the UN High-Level meeting on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in September 2018, the work of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on the Implementation of the SDGs and of the changing EU leadership in 2019, the Manifesto provides recommendations to the European Commission to make action in this area an essential part of its political agenda. Public health is a vehicle for policy coherence and represents an exceptional opportunity for bringing the EU added-value to all EU Member States.