

## A bold move to address one of Europe's biggest health challenges

### ECDA statement on the new EU NCDs Initiative

*The European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA) welcomes the announcement by the European Commission of a new strategic approach to address major non-communicable diseases in Europe in a systematic and ambitious way, which includes a focus on health promotion and disease prevention.*

Chronic diseases represent a major health challenge across Europe, in every EU country. Their high prevalence has continued to exponentially grow over the past decades, fuelled by under-investment in the area of prevention. It is expected to keep growing as a result of an ageing population and increased exposure to the well-known major risk factors and 'newer' determinants, without proper political and financial attention.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant, unprecedented impact on patients with chronic diseases, while it also affects people without any pre-existing conditions, resulting in the onset of chronic diseases and complications. It has underscored the clinical links between communicable and non-communicable diseases; and the need for holistic responses. In the current situation, a longer term collateral damage at individual, public health and socio-economic levels is no longer questioned. This "syndemic" has further exacerbated the importance of stepping up the prevention and control of chronic diseases and the need for significant commitment in the area with comprehensive strategies.

Against this background and building on the EU4Health programme, the European Commission's new vision to improve the response to chronic diseases is much welcome. The co-creation element will ensure that the expertise of the medical profession, patients and all other crucial experts helps define a strong and robust roadmap, expected in June 2022. The priority areas identified by the European Commission encompass the key areas of knowledge & data, health promotion and disease prevention including screening, diagnosis and treatment, and quality of life for patients. They have the potential to bring a new impetus across Europe to change the lives of the millions living with a chronic disease while protecting the rest of the population and younger generations.

For this initiative to be successful, the following aspects warrant consideration:

- an inclusive approach that goes beyond traditional siloes, addressing the interlinks between chronic diseases and fostering integrated, multidisciplinary care
- emphasis on the specific needs of children with dedicated actions
- prioritising health economic data collection and analysis efforts, to provide comparable evidence that can inform policymaking at all levels
- a bold vision and inclusive mindset to add value to other chronic diseases, such as kidney, liver, gastro-intestinal diseases, allergy and auto-immune diseases and the many more

ECDA supports the shift to a comprehensive, structured and pragmatic approach on chronic diseases, which it has favoured since its inception and further encouraged during the 2011 EU Reflection Process. ECDA will remain committed to work with the European Commission and all relevant stakeholders towards a chronic disease-free Europe and making this new initiative and its implementation one of Europe's greatest achievements in the field of public health.