

Dr. Ursula Von der Leyen
European Commission President

Stella Kyriakides
European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
Rue de la Loi 200, 1000 Brussels

Brussels, 23rd March 2020

SUBJECT: The EU's response to COVID-19

Dear European Commission President Dr. Von der Leyen,

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

In the current complex and fast-evolving situation across Europe resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the [European Chronic Disease Alliance \(ECDA\)](#) would like to express our understanding and support to the European Commission in addressing this health crisis and assisting Member States in these challenging times. We appreciate the round the clock work you both are doing in these difficult circumstances.

Our organisation salutes the dedication and restless efforts of: EU and national policy makers who have taken far-reaching political decisions to protect public health; healthcare and allied professionals who are on the front line to care for Europeans; researchers and scientists who are searching for a cure and generating robust evidence to allow a better understanding of the epidemic and inform clinical practice and policy; as well as other individuals and organisations who contribute to preventing, containing, and mitigating the effects of the outbreak.

All these efforts show unity in protecting the lives of the European population.

People with chronic conditions are part of the specific risk groups who are more prone to developing severe forms of the disease according to current evidence. ECDA welcomes the advice of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) for these groups, their families and care-givers.

COVID-19 may have pinpointed some of the limits of EU healthcare systems, crisis preparedness and planning. However, it is showing that European cooperation and solidarity, per the values of the European Union, are crucial and more than ever needed; and that a coordinated response is essential. Further, it depicts the potential and capacity of the EU in taking action in the health field and the utmost importance of pooling expertise and resources across Europe to fight health challenges.

Indeed, health is a human right and the backbone of strong, competitive and sustainable societies and economies.

While the medical “branches” of our members are working on the frontline of the outbreak, ECDA remains fully committed to support the European Commission in responding to this crisis, and working together for visionary health action at the EU level. ECDA will continue to support more European-level decision making in dealing with health issues.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Em. Raymond Vanholder
Chairman, On behalf of the European Chronic Diseases Alliance (ECDA)

About the European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA):

The European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA) is a Brussels-based coalition of 11 European health organizations representing major chronic diseases and sharing the same interests in combating preventable chronic diseases through European policies that impact health. Together, we represent over millions of patients and over 200,000 health professionals.

ECDA plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of chronic diseases by providing policy recommendations based on contemporary evidence. Its main priorities are primary and secondary prevention related to chronic diseases and the common risk factors - tobacco use, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption, and environmental factors.

Members of the Alliance:

- European Academy of Allergy & Clinical Immunology (EAACI)
- 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)
- International Diabetes Federation Europe (IDF Europe)
- United European Gastroenterology (UEG)

For more information, please visit: www.alliancechronicdiseases.org

About non-communicable chronic diseases:

Chronic diseases (such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, chronic digestive disease, allergy, asthma or hypertension) are by far the leading cause of mortality in Europe, representing 77% of the total disease burden and 86% of all deaths. Every year in the EU, 550,000 people of working age die prematurely from the four major chronic diseases, with significant economic and societal costs. One-third of the European population aged 15 and over lives with a chronic disease, affecting people of working-age (23.5%), Europeans aged 65 and older (more than 80%) as well as younger generations. These diseases are linked by common risk factors and determinants, which provide opportunities for impactful cross-sectoral interventions. Greater prevention, early detection and appropriate management would contribute to improving outcomes for patients, reducing the overall incidence of chronic diseases, while ensuring the sustainability of healthcare systems and the economy.