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United to reverse the rise in chronic disease

European
chronic
disease
alliance



Addressing climate and environmental-related challenges go hand-in-hand with protecting public health and preventing chronic disease

ECDA Statement on the European Green Deal



A healthy planet is essential to achieve a sustainable, climate-friendly societal and economic development but also to protect public health and prevent major chronic diseases. Indeed, these are for a major part determined by environmental exposures and risk factors.

- › Globally, **23% of all deaths could be prevented through healthier environments.**¹
- › Nearly **two thirds of the 12.6 million deaths caused by the environment each year are due to chronic diseases.**²
- › Chronic diseases account for an estimated **86% of the deaths and 77% of the disease burden in the WHO European Region.**³

The [European Chronic Disease Alliance \(ECDA\)](#) supports the effort of the European Green Deal announced in December 2019 for implementing a transition into a sustainable and ecological way of life, which sheds light on issues of public health. The ECDA believes that the initiatives set in the Deal and the frameworks that will be proposed to implement them, such as the European Climate Law, the new Industrial Strategy, or the Farm to Fork Strategy, should contain strong commitments and measures linked to people's health and wellbeing.

ECDA proposes below key considerations to **reinforce the European Green Deal with regard to chronic disease prevention as well as public health in Europe**; and make further connections between ambitions in these areas.

Clean energy

- › Fossil fuel combustion is a major source of smog and air pollution. **A switch from fossil fuels to renewable and clean, low carbon and zero-carbon energy sources** will lower the levels of CO₂ and offer important benefits to public health given the improved air quality.⁴
- › The incremental costs of transitioning to low-carbon energy would be outweighed by the enormous gains in health and productivity, while reducing or stopping human-induced climate change.⁵

Sustainable industry

- › ECDA highlights the significance of making efforts to reduce the impact of industrial emissions, emissions from power plants, as well as intensive agriculture, energy performance of products and non-road mobile machinery on overall health. Industrial activity is responsible for a large portion of European emissions – the resource and energy-intensive industry is the third largest climate polluter in Europe.
- › The ECDA calls for a **stricter regulation of emissions from industrial processes in the Industrial Strategy, and tougher implementation of the Directive governing the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)** for the 2021-2030 period.⁶
- › **Green Procurement** should also be further encouraged and facilitated via the Industrial Strategy and other relevant mechanisms and made more systematic for member states and public authorities to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal.

Building and renovating

- › Further to the legislation on the energy performance of buildings, the European Commission should:
 - › take additional measures to **improve indoor air quality** in existing, renovated and new buildings in Europe, including with an Indoor Air Quality Certificate defining common standards;
 - › ensure that citizens are adequately protected from exposure to chemical pollutants, outdoor contaminants, and biological agents in closed spaces.
- › More generally, **EU policy should further recognize the link between the energy performance of buildings and the health status of the population.** Priority should be given to renovating and enforcing measures to improve the energy performance of social housing, schools and hospitals.

Sustainable mobility

- › The European Green Deal's objective of reducing emissions from transport should also **take into account urban planning measures** (e.g. optimal design of cycle paths in relation to roads, optimal city design facilitating access and use of non-polluting transport modes etc) as they play a significant role in reducing the effects of air pollution and protecting citizens' health.
- › Stricter standards on pollution by cars as well as **measures to reduce pollution in EU ports and improve air quality near airports** will support better health for citizens and help address socio-economic inequalities exacerbating exposure to poor air quality from these sources.

Biodiversity

- › Considering that public health and well-being are closely linked to the quality of the environment, the ECDA highlights the **detrimental effects of biodiversity loss on human health** and therefore supports a comprehensive strategy to protect European biodiversity.⁷
- › **Nature relatedness should especially be emphasized in the care of children and the elderly.**

Taking “nature” to modern cities in a controlled way is possible but a challenge for urban planning, nature conservation, housing, traffic arrangements, energy production, and importantly for supplying and distributing food. These challenges must be addressed to effectively shift towards nature-friendly, health enabling environments.

From Farm to Fork Strategy

As part of the envisioned actions to help consumers choose healthy and sustainable diets (Healthy Consumption):

- › ECDA welcomes the goal to “reduce significantly the dependency, risk and use of chemical pesticides, as well as of fertilisers, antibiotics” in farming and food production processes; but commends that measurable targets be defined and that a **zero tolerance approach be taken for substances placing a high risk on human health** as per the latest scientific evidence.
- › **Food reformulation** is to be tackled as a collective effort - it is a challenge of the entire society. A regulatory approach is needed as the free market will not solve the issues alone. The Commission should further **ban food additives that are harmful to human health.**
- › ECDA calls on the European Commission to **establish nutrient profiles.** Consumption of food containing medium to high quantities of saturated fat, added salt, added sugars is still high in Europe. The EU has the capacity to restrict consumption by measures such as **regulating the advertising and marketing of industrially processed foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt** and by fiscal measures.⁸
- › The Strategy should also provide the means for an **EU-wide mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling system.** This would ensure that consumers receive transparent, comparable and harmonised product information. EU frameworks must set legally-binding conditions for the food industry to improve labelling.
- › Finally, the Strategy should address the issue of **dual quality food products** in Europe in order to ensure a high and equivalent level of human health protection across countries.

Eliminating Pollution

- › The decision to review air quality standards in line with the World Health Organization guidelines is very welcome since air pollution is the leading environmental cause of death globally; and poor air quality impacts the entire body with the effects ranging from early life inflammation to premature deaths.
- › The current evaluation of the Ambient Air Quality Directives should allow to **examine means to improve implementation of the legislation**, such as examining the reliability of data reported and reinforced air quality plans, in a more systematic way than only when national member states are in breach of the current legislation. The EU Green Deal can help define strong ambitions in this area.
- › While a new chemicals strategy is discussed, **ambitious legislative proposals should be made by end 2020 to tackle endocrine disruptors**, especially in cosmetics, toys and food contact materials. Rules on assessment of substances launched on the market should be strengthened giving priority to latest scientific evidence on health risks over competitiveness or economic concerns.
- › **The current pandemic demonstrates the importance of reducing environmental pollution:** regions with higher levels of air pollution have higher mortality rates from COVID-19.⁹

The European Green Deal is an important opportunity to:

1. **Implement policy that improves people’s health and wellbeing**
2. **Bring more coherence into sectorial policies that have an important impact on public health**

Healthy environments play a crucial role in the prevention and control of chronic diseases, which are a major health challenge across Europe and globally. The consequences of these diseases on Europeans’ health and quality of life, as well as on our economies cannot be underestimated.

The European Green Deal and environmental health protection should be an integral part of any inclusive and sustainable growth strategy. In light of the current crisis, they should be a **priority of Europe’s post COVID-19 recovery plan.**

About ECDA

The European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA) is a Brussels-based coalition of 11 European health organizations representing major chronic diseases such as: liver disease, kidney disease, respiratory disease, COPD, allergic diseases, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cancer, and diabetes; 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.

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Endnotes

1. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/258796/WHO-FWC-EPE-17.01%20eng.pdf;jsessionid=C169925C36FF531520B1EC3D93D47F68?sequence=1>
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3. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases>
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5. <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/94/7/16-030716/en/>
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