

Press release

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## **World Heart Day resonates with recent experts' findings on CVD and EU Institutions' determination to promote heart health**

Despite the decline of heart disease mortality registered in the past 30 years, cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the N.1 killer in Europe and in the World [1].

In the EU, experts reveal that striking disparities still exist between countries not only in terms of CVD incidence, but also with regard to national prevention policies. In view of this, there is a clear case for EU to step up action to tackle heart disease and stroke.

The message coincides with World Heart Day, which will take place on Sunday 27 September to inform people around the globe that 80% of premature deaths due to heart disease and stroke can be avoided [2].

### **CV burden and huge inequalities among European countries**

The EU ranks very high in terms of wealth per person compared to the rest of the world [3], with a consequent high quality of life and life expectancy. However, the EU is faced with increasing rates of obesity and diabetes II, cardiovascular disease risk factors, which affect both younger EU citizens (often leading an unhealthy lifestyle) and the more fragile elderly population. This greatly impacts Europe's well-being as Member States are called to deal with an unhealthy workforce and rising health care costs [4].

Mortality rates are falling in most (but not all) countries, according to findings released by the EuroHeart mapping project.(5) However, this detailed research, , also reveals huge inequalities among countries both in the rate of cardiovascular mortality and in national prevention programmes.

The research highlights striking inequalities among countries in terms of CHD prevention policies and legislation.

\* All countries reported some type of legislation covering public health, tobacco control and food. However, Denmark and Greece do not have national policies relating specifically to coronary heart disease.

\* Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy and Slovenia have five policies in place related to cardiovascular health

promotion, CHD, hypertension, stroke and hyperlipidaemia; Greece had just one.

\* Two countries reported no national guidelines within the broad context of cardiovascular disease (Denmark and Greece). All other countries reported national guidelines on CHD and hypertension, with a minority (Belgium, Finland, Ireland) reporting official government endorsement of existing European guidelines. Most countries had national guidelines on the management of hyperlipidaemia (except Denmark and Greece), diabetes and stroke prevention. Twelve countries (excepting Denmark, Greece and Slovenia) had obesity guidelines.

\* Only three countries (France, Germany and Ireland) reported recommendations for emergency first-aid (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and access to and training in the use of external defibrillators).

### **World Heart Day acts as a milestone to remind the EU that CVD can be managed through appropriate policies**

The EU Commissioner for Health, Androulla Vassiliou, welcomes the work of stakeholders : "The European Heart Network and the European Society of Cardiology are our key partners in our aim of alleviating the burden of cardiovascular diseases in Europe" and recognises " the valuable work of the European Parliament and the MEP Heart Group in this area." "I am sure that the incoming European Commission will want to build on its collaboration with the new European Parliament on this important issue", she says.

Mr Dirk Sterckx, Belgian MEP and co-chair of the MEP Heart Group supports this action, saying: "Nobody can deny that cardiovascular diseases present a very heavy burden in all EU member states. On the occasion of the World Heart Day, I strongly invite my fellow MEPs to make a statement in favour of heart health by joining the MEP Heart Group."

Linda McAvan UK MEP, co-chair of the MEP HG, is also in favour, saying: "I am very proud to co-chair the MEP Heart Group this term. The EP has a role to play in making cardiovascular health a priority in Europe."

The Director of the European Heart Network, Susanne Logstrup adds her voice, saying: "World Heart Day is a prompt to all that there is no room for complacency when it comes to CVD prevention."

Professor Roberto Ferrari, President of the European Society of Cardiology, joins Ms Logstrup in "calling upon the newly elected MEPs to take up the baton - the European Parliament resolution of 12 July 2007 on action to tackle cardiovascular disease - kindly reminding the European Commission of the need for a concrete European strategy on prevention of cardiovascular diseases".

- [1] Diseases of the heart and circulatory system are the main cause of death in Europe: accounting for over 4.30 million deaths each year. "European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics 2008", European Heart Network, p.11
- [2] World Heart Federation, 2009.
- [3] The EU ranks third after the USA and Japan. "Wealth per person: Gross Domestic Product per person in Purchasing Power Standard, 2007", EuroStat
- [4] Overall, CVD is estimated to cost the EU economy €192 billion a year. "European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics 2008", European Heart Network, p.8
- [5] Cowburn G, Bhatnagar P, Logstrup S. National plans, policies and measures impacting on cardiovascular health promotion and cardiovascular disease prevention. European Heart Network, European Society of Cardiology 2009.

\* Significant policy developments addressing cardiovascular disease have taken place in Europe, including the Council Conclusions to promote heart health adopted in 2004, the European Heart Health Charter launched in 2007, and the European Parliament Resolution on action to tackle cardiovascular disease adopted with a large majority in July 2007.

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