



fighting heart disease  
and stroke

european heart network

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## European Commission Healthier Together Initiative 2022

### Input from the European Heart Network

Given the high prevalence in mortality and morbidity, as well as the high burden of cardiovascular diseases (CVD) in European society, we call on EU policymakers to prioritise cardiovascular health.

**1. A European Cardiovascular Health Plan will have a trickle-down effect to improve resilience of health systems and meet global commitments.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the burden from CVD, which was already greater than that of any other disease and the leading cause of death in the EU. Beating CVD with a comprehensive, EU-wide plan for primary and secondary prevention, early detection, patient care, management and treatment, is an opportunity for the EU to emerge as innovator and world leader in public health. The plan needs to include clear targets, milestones, incentives, and financing available for EU Member States and for CVD research and innovation.

**2. Keep investing in creating healthier living environments, coupled with investments in early detection for the purpose of early intervention and secondary prevention of CVD to improve health outcomes and quality of life for European citizens.**

To date, the premise that CVD is a lifestyle disease has led to public health interventions (primary prevention) aimed at tackling lifestyle determinants. However, causes for CVD are multi-factorial and, given the scale of the disease, it would be more appropriate to refer to CVD as a societal disease. Greater reduction of exposure to the main behavioural risk factors – tobacco, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and harmful use of alcohol – would increase the number of years lived in good health and will produce large societal gains. Moreover, unmodifiable risk factors such as genetic predisposition, congenital factors, functional decline due to ageing, or cardiovascular morbidity due to other chronic conditions or infectious disease such as COVID-19, and their therapies cannot be ignored. Secondary prevention is therefore equally crucial. By investing in early detection, more patients will be identified and have the possibility to be treated early in quality-assured pathways to prevent the onset of the disease, debilitating CVD events and deaths. In

addition, more reliable data on CVD will become available. Better data on CVD, will stimulate research and enable data driven healthcare.

**3. Unlock the full potential of digital technologies for cardiovascular health.**

Build data and digital capacity (including registries) to fill knowledge gaps in the clinical context (epidemiology, clinical management, drug utilisation, safety and effectiveness) and enable innovation with the aim of improving patient outcomes and the quality of life for people living with CVD.

**4. Modernise cardiovascular patients' pathway by supporting interdisciplinary health care models combined with digital health to strengthen outpatient care.**

Interdisciplinary patient care, combined with effective tools for digital health, will not only improve patient welfare but also reduce the costs to health care systems. Digital technologies in health care delivery provide the opportunity to redesign and improve patients' care after diagnosis and discharge, thanks to innovations in telemedicine, remote monitoring and telerehabilitation. Strengthening outpatient care programmes, especially in geographical areas with low structural capability, can improve the safety, quality of life and survival prognosis of many patients. Although there is convincing scientific evidence for the success of digital health, it has so far only been used to a limited extent. Modernising patient pathways will improve the resilience of our health systems and minimise disruptions caused by shock events, such as a pandemic.

**5. Improve health and digital literacy to tackle inequalities.**

The uneven burden of CVD across different population groups reflects the wider inequalities within countries. Ambitious policies to ensure equal access to innovations and public investments into programmes aimed at improving health and digital literacy are important enablers to tackle inherent inequalities. Apart from the disparities due to CVD within countries, CVD is also the single most important contributor to excess mortality in Eastern European countries compared to Western countries. While among men less than 50% of the excess mortality is due to CVD, in women this percentage is even as high as 80%. Adequate use of structural and cohesion funds combined with improved digital literacy could be important contributors to bridging the gap.

All actions must be underpinned by multi-stakeholders' collaboration. Meaningful involvement of cardiovascular patients is crucial to ensure that future systems and innovations meet their real needs and expectations.

## **Annex: EHN strategic documents and papers**

The following papers and strategic documents from the European Heart Network include a list of concrete policy recommendations and examples of good practice that can inspire future European policies and programmes aimed at improving cardiovascular health for all European citizens.

- Fighting cardiovascular disease—a blueprint for European Action, European Heart Network and the European Society of Cardiology, 2020 <https://ehnheart.org/eu-action-on-cvd.html>
- EHN paper, 2021, CVD Risk Assessment Programmes, <https://ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/publications/1304:cvd-screening-2021.html>
- EHN paper, 2020, What is the value of digital tools for cardiovascular patients? <https://ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/publications/1285:digital-tools-cardiovascular-patients.html>
- EHN paper, 2020, Physical Activity Policies for Cardiovascular Health, <https://ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/publications/1243:physical-activity-policies-for-cardiovascular-health.html>
- EHN paper, 2020, Electronic Cigarettes and Cardiovascular Disease, <https://ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/publications/1241:electronic-cigarettes-and-cardiovascular-disease.html>
- EHN paper, 2022, Heated Tobacco Products and CVD, <https://ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/position-papers-and-statements/1327:heated-tobacco-products.html>
- EHN paper 2019, Heart Failure and Cardiovascular Diseases, <https://ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/publications/1202:heart-failure-and-cardiovascular-diseases.html>
- EHN paper, 2017, Transforming European Food and Drink policies for cardiovascular health, <https://ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/publications/1093:transforming-european-food-and-drinks-policies-for-cardiovascular-health.html>