

EKHA summary of the European Commission Conference "Towards better prevention and management of chronic diseases",

21st April, Brussels

The full conference can be viewed online [here](#)

Alongside its 10 partners from the European Chronic Disease Alliance, EKHA attended the long-awaited conference hosted by the European Commission to reveal its approach to preventing and managing chronic diseases in the next years. The conference gathered a full house of representatives from Member States, NGOs and other health stakeholders in Brussels.

Opening speech by EU Health Commissioner Andriukaitis



EU Commissioner for Health, Dr Vytenis Andriukaitis invited all stakeholders to build a solid and committed alliance in the pursuit of the common objectives on the chronic disease agenda: his 3 Ps of Prevention, Promotion, Protection, and he added a 4th – Participation of all stakeholders, from governments, health professionals, patients, and even industry. He also highlighted the benefits of eHealth in the management of chronic diseases and particularly noted that cooperation with DG

CONNECT needed to be increased exponentially to meet the needs of healthcare delivery in the future.

Familiar themes were recited: “Cooperation and coordination is needed, more work should be done in the Member States”.

European Chronic Disease Alliance’s presentation

The Commissioner’s introduction was followed by the **European Chronic Disease Alliance presentation, into which EKHA had contributed.**

ECDA Chair Prof Johan De Sutter said: “Chronic diseases are posing an urgent and increasing burden on our society. Only a comprehensible framework on chronic disease, which involves all policy areas, all stakeholders, and takes into account the specific realities and needs of the different regions within Europe, will successfully curb the threat that they pose to our health and our future.

DG SANTE Deputy Director General Martin Seychell's intervention



DG Sante Deputy Director General Martin Seychell showcased the many activities the Commission is running on chronic diseases, including the funding of new Joint Actions and invited all stakeholders to get involved via their national governments.

The commission's new approach on chronic diseases consists of four pillars:

EU Commission new approach on chronic diseases

Systematic review of existing EU groups, structures and instruments to come up with a list of effective actions which can be streamlined and which will give comprehensive and cross-cutting approach.

New Joint Action and related Pilot Actions to be launched as a part of the [2016 Annual Work Plan for Health](#). The call to participate in the over-arching Joint Action will be launched later in the year and all stakeholders are encouraged to seek involvement through their national competent authority. Joint Actions are co-financed with Member State Authorities. The Commission's contribution to this Joint Action is currently set at 5,000,000 EUR. In terms of Pilot Actions, focus areas which have already been identified are: Stroke prevention; Guidance on type 2 diabetes; Action on mental health; the Commission is seeking recommendations for other areas of focus.

Support to Member States to implement national strategies on chronic diseases. This will be implemented through a call for proposals for projects which identify or develop evidence-based measures that can be shared across Member States. The budget allocated to this call is 2,500,000 EUR.

Collaboration across sectors to ensure going forward that work is carried out with a cross-cutting approach, for instance incorporating eHealth into actions.

He also presented the **European Health Policy Forum (online) Platform**, which is meant to improve communication between DG SANTE and health interest groups to facilitate the work of the Commission and its multiple health working groups. The platform provides an opportunity to launch discussion, events, share documents, etc online. The Commission hopes that this will become a powerful tool for communicating and working collaboratively between the

Commission and EU and national health ministries but also amongst health stakeholders themselves. Participants expressed concerns on the usefulness of the platform in practice.

Debate with the audience on regulation

During the open forum, a number of Member States, particularly Luxembourg, Finland, Austria and Latvia expressed frustration on the lack of action while the EU had competencies and could impact, particularly by introducing regulation to address the obvious risk factors - alcohol policy, food labelling, tobacco control. "We have a unique legal base and we don't use it? We would like to see it fully used in this area" said the representative from Finland. The Austria delegate stated: " We are calling on the Commission to please, go after the big things". Their call was applauded by the majority of participants.

However, after criticism of the failed attempt in place the proposed alcohol policy last autumn, Commission Andriukaitis replied that his Cabinet could not change current excise duties on alcohol in all the 28 EU countries when such a decision can only be passed through total unanimity in the Council.

Clear about his frustration with the current situation, he called on stakeholders to put their actions in effect and to exert pressure on their national governments to agree to stronger regulation at EU level: "Further taxation would be best instrument to fight alcohol abuse," he said, and he is personally behind this approach.

"Please send letters to Prime Ministers of countries which have the lowest level of excise duties; please send letters to the Presidents, please encourage Member States together with me to introduce taxation instruments at home, this is the way forward," he said.

Final speech by John Ryan, Acting Director on Public Health DG SANTE

At the end of the day, **John Ryan, the DG's Acting Director on Public Health**, acknowledged that there has been much talk and many conferences but too little progress. "It's the third event on chronic diseases in as many years that I have participated, we really have to do something now," he stated in agreement with stakeholders.