

Kidney health and underestimated diseases

Obesity is dramatically on the rise and leads to some of the deadliest health conditions, warns **Karin Kadenbach**



Karin Kadenbach (S&D, AT) is Chair of Parliament's kidney health intergroup

On the occasion of the World Kidney Day, I am taking the opportunity to raise awareness for the underestimated health problems of obesity and chronic kidney disease.

Weight problems and obesity are dramatically on the increase in low and middle income countries. Nearly one person in every six aged 18 or over in the EU is obese, according to the latest available data. Obesity

has rapidly increased over the past 14 years in countries like Austria, France, Finland, Ireland, as well as Iceland, Norway and Turkey.

According to the WHO, non-communicable diseases are the cause of 86 per cent of all deaths in the EU. Overweight and obesity are major risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, hypertension, stroke, some forms of cancer and chronic kidney disease (CKD). The latter has been receiving relatively little attention compared to the other conditions mentioned. Compared to lean individuals, those affected by obesity have an 83 per

cent increased risk of CKD.

It is important to tackle the rapid rise of both obesity and chronic kidney disease, since chronic kidney disease is one of the most powerful risk factors for other adverse outcomes. As a consequence, patients with CKD use considerably more healthcare resources compared to people with normal renal function.

Importantly, obesity has been shown to be preventable by relatively simple lifestyle modifications, while in many cases of CKD, the only thing physicians can do is to slow the progression of the disease; currently there is no cure available.

In other words, obesity is a serious public health problem. Obesity itself and its resulting conditions such as CKD increase costs for our healthcare →

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population health outcomes.

Parliament’s S&D group voted for a resolution calling on the European Commission to rethink its plans for lax limits on sugar in baby foods. Food high in fats, salt and sugars is promoted extensively, are more visible, cheaper and easier to obtain than healthy options.

Food marketing has consistently been shown to influence children’s food preferences and choices, to shape their dietary habits and increase their risk of obesity. It is therefore not only important but essential to have food packaging that provides clear information on the content.

All pre-packaged foods that are marketed from December 2016, must display a nutritional label. The implementation of the EU directive in all member states results in better food labelling, which helps consumers de-

cide which product they should buy and which will be better for them. Informed consumers make better, healthier food choices.

The Commission coordinates the high level group on nutrition and physical activity of European government representatives. This aims to share best practice and discuss solutions

for addressing challenges such as childhood obesity.

The group’s EU action plan on childhood obesity 2014-20 defines priority areas for voluntary action to halt the increase in overweight and obesity in children and young people by 2020.

As Chair of Parliament’s kidney health intergroup, it is my priority shine a light on kidney health issues. As such, the group will participate in the annual European Kidney Forum, which will be held on 11 April in Brussels. ★

systems. Our goal should be to avoid, rather than treat. Therefore, the EU must invest in disease prevention.

Evidence suggests that even a relatively minor investment in prevention would deliver considerable health gains and reduced future healthcare costs.

Population-wide actions to lower the consumption of fats, salt and sugars and to increase daily physical activity are highly cost-effective ac-

tions to tackle overweight and obesity and related comorbidities.

In particular, the consumption of processed food correlates with elevated salt intake. It is known that people with high salt intake show higher age-associated increases in blood pressure, which increases their risk of heart disease and stroke. The EU should follow WHO recommendations to reduce salt in processed foods; reducing salt intake improves