



Meeting minutes

Stakeholder webinar on prevention of non-communicable diseases

20 March 2024

The stakeholder webinar on prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) was held on 20 March 2024. It was chaired by DG SANTE with around 100 participants from the stakeholder community.

Welcome and introduction

DG SANTE opened the meeting and introduced the agenda. The objectives of the meeting were providing an update on the EU policies and projects on prevention of NCDs and providing an opportunity to EU-level associations to present their actions and ideas on how to support Member States in reducing the burden of NCDs.

Update on EU policies on the prevention of NCDs

DG SANTE updated participants on the relevant public health initiatives on NCD prevention, namely:

- The **‘Healthier together’ – initiative**: DG SANTE highlighted that all 5 strands of this key initiative are currently being implemented.
- **Tobacco**: DG SANTE shared brief updates on the ban on flavours of heated tobacco products, effective since October 2023, and the upcoming expansion, scheduled for May 2024, of the track-and-trace mechanism system, which monitors the movement of tobacco products across Europe. This expansion will encompass all types of tobacco products, enhancing regulatory oversight and control.
- **Council recommendation on vaccine preventable cancers**: DG SANTE explained that it aims to support Member States in reducing the burden from cancers caused by infections with human papillomaviruses and hepatitis B. The initiative is being negotiated at the Council.
- The **Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health**: An overview of the recent developments was given, such as the European Mental Health Capacity Building initiative (together with WHO Europe), the multidisciplinary training and cross-border exchange programme on mental health, the work on stigma and discrimination of mental health, and the call for best and promising practices in mental health.

DG SANTE highlighted that the work on NCDs reduction is a shared responsibility and that governments and public health authorities alone cannot achieve this aim. The focus should be on reaching out and involving vulnerable groups and those in socioeconomically disadvantaged situations.

Three key points were made on the upcoming new political cycle as an opportunity for stakeholders: (1) to take forward an holistic health and prevention-focused agenda, in a coordinated way, avoiding competition between organisations and diseases; (2) to explore the full potential of available tools rather than by default asking for more/new ones; and (3) to support the horizontal approach to prevention, for better efficiency and higher impact, as endorsed by Member States, and avoid the temptation to ask for multiple, unsustainable disease-specific strategies.

Presentation of the main EU4Health funded projects

HaDEA presented a state of play of the projects funded under the EU4Health programme that help to reduce the prevalence of NCDs, including ongoing Joint Actions and action grants. This also showed how the ‘Healthier together’ - initiative, and the Commission communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, have been reflected in the annual work programmes (AWP).

Two joint actions were presented under the 2021 AWP, namely, the **CARA4DIABETES**, aiming at improving and fostering health in the EU Member States by reducing the burden of type 2 diabetes and related risk factors, and the **HEALTH4EUkids**, targeting obesity prevention for children and adolescents in regions with particular social challenges. In addition, the presentation included three action grants, related to healthy lifestyles in the school settings, namely, **IHLGIS**, **SCHOOL4HEALTH** and **RYHEALTH**. The annual programme 2021 also included projects on mental health, such as **Mentality** and **STEP in**.

Under the 2022 AWP, two action grants, **Icehearts** and **Let's talk about children**, focusing on improving children and young people's mental health were presented. A call for proposals on promoting mental health focusing on implementing promising best practices to improve mental health and psychological wellbeing in migrant and refugee populations, selected four projects: **Peace of Mind**, **WELL.U**, **iFightDepression** and **U-RISE**. The 2022 AWP also included the following projects:

- Two Joint Actions: **JACARDI** (Joint Action on CARdiovascular Diseases and Diabetes) and **JAPreventNCD** on cancer and other NCDs prevention and **PREVENTC** on chronic kidney disease and
- 9 new action grants on cardiovascular diseases and diabetes and 4 new action grants on health determinants.

Regarding AWP 2023, HaDEA highlighted the ongoing evaluations of proposals for the Joint Actions on mental health, dementia and other neurological disorders, and chronic respiratory diseases. There are also four action grants, notably on mental health, mental health challenges for cancer patients and survivors, dementia and other neurological disorders and chronic respiratory diseases.

Presentation of posters by stakeholders

Eight EU-level associations presented what their organisation propose do to reduce the burden of NCDs. Each association outlined their approaches, and how they aim to address specific public health challenges and implement their ideas.

The presentations were:

- EU Structural Heart Disease Coalition presented their idea to promote heart check for the elderly population, aiming to reduce the burden of heart disease and improve the quality of life for Europeans.
- European Heart Network presented their comprehensive, EU-wide Cardiovascular health plan for primary and secondary prevention, early detection, patient care, management and treatment.
- International sport and culture association presented their proposal to improve mental health, physical activity, and well-being for disadvantaged target groups in Europe through further development and scale-out of the research-based “ABCs of Mental Health” model.
- European Lung Health Group presented the Keep Breathing initiative aiming at outlining how improving lung health and chronic respiratory diseases at European level can lead to healthier, stronger, more resilient societies.
- European Alliance for Cardiovascular Health presented their idea aiming at implementing targeted European Cardiovascular Health checks for individuals at risk or living with cardiovascular, diabetes, and chronic kidney diseases.
- European Chronic Disease Alliance presented an innovative financing model for prevention, in addition to stimulating multi-sectoral dialogue and cooperation and supporting action and progress in the EU.
- European Federation of Psychologists Associations presented its idea to establish and implement a comprehensive and unified EU mental health strategy.
- International Diabetes Federation European Region presented their proposal to promote the uptake of affordable and sustainable plant-based diets in the prevention and management of diabetes, to ultimately reduce premature death and disability from NCDs.

The posters can be accessed here: [Stakeholder webinar: prevention of non-communicable diseases - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

Discussion

The discussion offered participants the chance to raise their questions regarding the presented posters. Stakeholders mainly emphasised the importance of an enhanced collaboration across sectors, in addition to an improved dialogue with Member States.

In addition, participants inquired about:

- The status of mental health reforms as a flagship initiative for the 2024 call under the Technical Support Initiative managed by DG REFORM. DG SANTE clarified that evaluations of the proposals submitted by the Member States are ongoing.
- The Joint Action related to dementia and other neurological conditions. DG SANTE explained that the proposal from Member States is currently being evaluated. Once the evaluation process is finalised and the project is launched, details will be accessible through the Europa and HaDEA websites.
- The WHO-led project on capacity building on mental health across policies and the project on multidisciplinary capacity building for mental health professionals are ongoing and DG SANTE explained information will be available on the Europa website.

Stakeholders supported the overarching understanding that health promotion and disease prevention are key, the importance of thinking about health and not only on specific diseases, and that we should use available tools to promote lifelong prevention. The importance of an enhanced collaboration across sectors, and between Member States and stakeholders, including patient groups, was underlined.

Next steps and end of the meeting

The Chair thanked the associations that presented the posters and reminded that the presentation did not imply that funding was foreseen for such actions. The Commission will inform the Expert Group on Public Health of the outcome of the webinar, including the poster ideas.

The Chair then closed the meeting, thanking the participants for the active participation and valuable conclusions.