



European
Commission

EU non-communicable diseases (NCDs) initiative

Frequently asked questions

QUESTIONS

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Q1. What is the 'Healthier Together' EU non-communicable diseases (NCDs) initiative?

The EU non-communicable diseases (NCDs) initiative aims to help EU countries reduce the burden of NCDs and improve the citizens' health and well-being by reinforcing the support for action of the Member States and relevant stakeholders in this area.

The initiative includes the following five strands: cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, mental health and neurological disorders, and health determinants. All strands include a health equity dimension, thus supporting the reduction of health inequalities. While the strands address particular challenges of each disease group, the initiative also promote a non-disease specific integrated and coordinated approach to prevention and care. Moreover, the initiative promote patient-centred pathways accounting for co-morbidities.

To achieve this purpose, the EU Non-communicable diseases Initiative:

- identifies priorities, targets and evidence-based and/or promising initiatives preferred by the Member States and relevant stakeholders (health professionals, civil society organisations, patients organisations, etc.) in the area of NCDs
- maps, organises and focuses the Commission's actions and tools on the topic, helping the Member States with knowledge, governance, identification of best practices, collaboration and financing.

The initiative supports Member States in reaching target 3.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals: reduce by one-third premature mortality from NCDs by 2030. In addition to this, the initiative contributes to reducing the burden on health and social protection systems, and contribute to a healthier workforce and more resilient societies.

Q2. Why does this matter?

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are responsible for 80% of the disease burden in the Member States and about two thirds of all deaths in the European region. NCDs do not only affect life expectancy, they also negatively affect the quality of life and participation opportunities of people living with NCDs and their families. Despite all that, no more than 3% of national health budgets support health promotion and disease prevention.

The costs of treating NCDs are high and expected to grow, especially given the EU's aging population. This also poses a high burden on national health care systems. Moreover, the past year has shown that people suffering from NCDs can be more affected by other diseases such as COVID-19. Improved health promotion and disease prevention can reduce the prevalence of NCDs by as much as 70%.

Q3. Why now?

The almost exclusive focus on COVID since 2020 has had consequences outside the remit of infectious diseases. Diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases was forcibly postponed. Health prevention and promotion activities have been put on hold exactly when

people's lifestyles and mental health deteriorated, which again led to an increased demand for medical attention caused by complications of non-communicable diseases.

In other words, a situation that was already serious has become even more challenging. Reducing the burden of NCDs should be part of our efforts to build back better.

In addition to this, the Union has adopted the EU4Health Programme (2021-2027), an ambitious and dedicated funding programme for 2021-2027 that will ensure a high level of human health protection. The EU4Health programme is a real game changer to reduce the burden of NCDs, as it allocates at least 20% of its annual budget for health promotion and disease prevention.

Q4. What is the duration of this initiative?

The EU Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) Initiative covers the period 2022-2027 and follows the framework of the EU4Health programme.

Stakeholders are welcome to provide written comments to the EU NCD Initiative document, using the template available at the Health policy platform, from January to the end of April 2022. This will allow their input to be considered for the discussions with Member States and for the June version of the document. Stakeholders are invited to provide their written input as early as possible: the earlier the comments are provided, the more thoroughly they can be discussed by the Member States. Stakeholders can also provide suggestions during the dedicated discussion webinars.

Q5. Who will be consulted on the initiative?

The EU Non-communicable diseases Initiative document is being co-created with the Member States through the Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases (SGPP) with input from relevant stakeholders to shape the initiative based on their needs and to explore opportunities for collaboration. Other Commission services, The World Health Organization (WHO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) are also being consulted.

This is relevant because, among others:

- the WHO has a Global Coordination Mechanism on the Prevention and Control of NCDs and is developing a new work plan for 2022-2025
- the OECD is working on evaluation of public health best practices
- the EIB provides billions of euros of funding in the area of health to both public and private stakeholders.

Q6. Why is this Initiative different?

This is the first time that the Commission addresses the main non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in a systematic and pragmatic way. It addresses the main areas of the NCDs challenge while targeting actions based on Member States' priorities. It is a major opportunity to generate impact on a key area of health burden and Member States' needs.



Q7. When will the EU Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) Initiative be ready?

The NCDs initiative is expected to be finalised by the second quarter of 2022. It will support actions for the coming years, with a view of helping Member States reach the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 targets and the WHO 2025 targets on NCDs.



Q8. What actions will be supported?

The EU Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) Initiative is supporting and adding value and coordination to national efforts to decrease the human and financial burden of NCDs and reduce related health inequalities. It contributes in this way to the resilience of the EU society and the sustainability of health care and social protection systems.

This is done primarily via implementation of health promotion and prevention actions: for Member States to replicate best practices, develop guidelines, roll out innovative approaches, etc. Stakeholders will be supported in actions that can contribute to the same objectives.

While focusing on promotion and prevention, this initiative may also support better knowledge and data, screening and early detection, diagnosis and treatment management, and quality of life of patients.

Member States are prioritising areas of EU-added value and cross-border relevance or where mutual learning and cooperation is particularly important. Support may complement efforts in areas of national competence only if that is required by the Member States.

To this aim, the EU Non-communicable diseases Initiative document will include a non-exhaustive list of actions that may receive support if chosen for voluntary uptake. This list will receive the feedback from Member States and relevant stakeholders.

Such a list may include replication of validated best practices, revision of guidance, protocols, screening guidelines and methodologies or accreditation schemes, preparation of NCDs national action plans, re-organisation of prevention and care models, technical and legal preparation for innovative policy initiatives, pilot testing of approaches, preparation of training materials, twinning and sharing actions.

Possible areas for such actions might include public health, healthcare organisation, and cross-sectorial action to promote health in all policies to improve health literacy and reduction of health inequalities.



Q9. What are the five strands?

The initiative includes the following five strands: Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, mental health and neurological disorders, and a horizontal strand for health determinants (including tobacco, nutrition, physical activity and alcohol, in coordination with the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan).

Some topics, such as health inequalities, integrated and patient-centred care will be addressed in all strands.

Q10. Why five strands?

These are the leading causes of avoidable premature death (not including cancer). Jointly, they account for 86% of deaths and 77% of the disease burden in the EU¹.

MAIN CAUSES OF MORTALITY IN THE EU¹

Over **4.6 million people** died in EU countries in 2017

Ranking	Cause	Percentage of all deaths
1	Diseases of circulatory system	37% (1.7 million)
2	Cancers	26% (1.2 million)
3	Respiratory diseases	8% (366 000)
4	External causes (suicide responsible 1%)	5% (48 000 deaths from suicide)
5	Alzheimer's + dementias	5% (around 230 000)
6	Diabetes	2% (around 114 400)

MORBIDITY OF THE MAIN DISEASES IN THE EU

Cause	Prevalence
Cardiovascular diseases	63 million people living with cardiovascular diseases in 2019 ³
Cancer	2.7 million people are expected to be diagnosed in 2020 ³
Respiratory diseases	4.3 % of the EU population has some form of chronic lower respiratory disease (other than asthma) diagnosed by a medical doctor in 2019 5.7 % of the adult population reported that they suffer from asthma in 2019 ⁴
Diabetes	32.3 million adults were diagnosed and an estimated 24.2 million undiagnosed ⁵
Mental disorders	One in nine adults (11%) on average had symptoms of psychological distress in 2018 ³
Dementia	9.1 million prevalence in people over 60 in 2018 ⁶

¹ WHO/Europe | Noncommunicable diseases

² https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/state/docs/2020_healthatglance_rep_en.pdf

³ Cardiovascular diseases prevention | Knowledge for policy (europa.eu)

⁴ Respiratory diseases statistics - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)

⁵ 20200302_133351_IDFATLAS9e-final-web.pdf (diabetesatlas.org)

⁶ Dementia prevention | Knowledge for policy (europa.eu)

AVOIDABLE DEATHS IN THE EU

- **Over 1 million premature deaths** across EU countries could have been avoided through better prevention and health care interventions
- Of these deaths, **644 000 or about 64% were considered preventable while 372 000 or about 36% were considered treatable**

PREVENTABLE CAUSES OF MORTALITY IN THE EU³

Ranking	Cause	Percentage of preventable deaths
1	Lung cancer	23%
2	Ischemic heart diseases	12%
3	Alcohol-related-deaths	11%
4	Transport and other accidents	8%
5	Stroke	6%
6	Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary disease (COPD) often related to smoking	6%
7	Suicide	6%

TREATABLE CAUSES OF MORTALITY IN THE EU³

Ranking	Cause	Percentage of treatable deaths
1	Ischemic heart disease	20%
2	Colorectal cancer	16%
3	Breast cancer	12%
4	Stroke	11%
5	Pneumonia	6%
6	Diabetes	4%
7	Hypertensive diseases	4%

Q11. When will work start on the different strands?

To help pace national efforts, the cardiovascular diseases and diabetes strands will be launched first, alongside the lifestyle determinants strand (given its synergy with cancer prevention and other NCDs).

Chronic respiratory diseases, mental health and neurological disorders would follow, in order to take stock and complement ongoing actions.

Q12. Is the Commission investing money in the EU Non-communicable diseases Initiative?

The exact figure of EU support may vary depending on which EU programme is activated to co-finance national action. In fact, one of the objectives is to provide more and better information to the Member States on the availability of funding. The EU4Health 2022 work programme includes more than €130 million for actions that fit the objective of the EU Non-communicable diseases Initiative. This support will be at the service of health authorities that will lead the public approach, in the form of Joint Actions. Importantly, it will be coordinated and combined with a reinforced support to stakeholders such as NGOs and professional associations for actions aiming at the same objectives. The EU4Health programme allocates at least 20% of its annual budget for health promotion and disease prevention.

Q13. Besides supporting Member States and stakeholders, what is the Commission doing?

The Commission is acting at five levels.

1. Improving governance for NCDs

The Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases (SGPP) has proven effective in advising the Commission, promoting coordination to address NCDs challenges, and helping Member States to implement validated best practices. This approach of identifying national priorities and supporting implementation will be reinforced.

2. Improving knowledge and data for action

Knowledge on NCDs is essential for evidence-based policy-making, for efficient prevention and for better care. In this context, the Horizon Europe programme in particular its health cluster is a key instrument to support research and innovation in the area of NCDs. It is also relevant to note the contribution of the Knowledge Centres of the Joint Research Centre to informing policy-makers in a transparent, tailored and concise manner about the latest scientific evidence. Other ongoing initiatives under this heading include making available policy briefs on disease prevention and providing targeted support to improving data quality of NCDs.

3. Identifying best practices, research results, guidelines and innovative approaches

The SGPP has been supporting wide-scale implementation in the priority areas identified by Member States. Its proven mechanism to identify validated best practices will be further improved to increase flexibility while retaining the high technical standard.

It will be complemented by the identification of scalable research and innovation projects and also by adding an innovation track. This innovation track will identify promising population-wide practices and guidelines that can improve citizens' health and well-being as well as the efficiency and quality in health systems.

4. Identifying/creating funding opportunities

The Commission offers Member States (through the SGPP) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) information on funding opportunities and promoting their coordinated use.

5. Increasing collaboration

A mapping exercise is taking place to highlight the different (legal, project, financial) ways the Commission can support Member States in the area of NCDs.