Europe’s CVD Challenges: No Time for Complacency

European Heart Network - the voice of Heart and Stroke Foundations and Associations in Europe
Strategic Plan
2019 - 2023

With 3.9 million deaths per year, cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the number one cause of death in Europe. Of these, over 1.8 million deaths are in the European Union (EU). Cardiovascular diseases include all diseases of the heart, as well as stroke.

For some people, heart disease and stroke can cause sudden and unexpected death; for others, death comes after a sometimes lengthy period of ill health. CVD can have devastating consequences on the lives of individuals. Their ill health may cause significant pain and suffering, often forcing them out of employment and making them dependent on health and care systems in their countries.

The European population is over 740 million people. Of this population, more than 85 million live with CVD. Of these 85 million Europeans, almost 49 million live in the EU. This group accounts for almost 10% of the EU’s 500 million population.

For individuals the impact on quality of life of CVD is huge.
For societies the economic burden of CVD is staggering.
For all there is an urgency in tackling CVD effectively.
And that is exactly what we are going to do.

If CVD were a country

Capitals: Heart Disease & Stroke

Population: 49 million, the same as the total population of Spain or Poland

Population Growth: 6 million per year, roughly the population of Denmark

Economy: €210 billion per year – that’s over 4 times the GDP of Bulgaria

Mortality: 1.8 million per year - of these, 192 000 die before age 65, which is 15 000 more than the population of Brussels

Productivity: 26 million years lost to ill health and early death
Our strengths lie in advocacy, awareness raising, networking and capacity building.

Our core values of independence, ambition and inclusiveness are what underpin our success.

Since its inception, EHN has more than doubled its membership.

EHN believes that every European has a right to life free from avoidable cardiovascular diseases

These are our success stories to date.

At the European Heart Network (EHN), our mission continues to be of the utmost importance. Whilst mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases have declined over the past decades, CVD remains the leading cause of death in Europe and a leading cause of ill health. Since its inception, EHN has more than doubled its membership. EHN plays a unique role in the EU health landscape and has an impressive track record; it is recognised as a reference organisation for politics, policy and research. Our mission is to play a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular diseases, in particular heart disease and stroke.

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EHN has influenced major policy developments:

- **Council Conclusions on promoting heart health (2004)**

- **EP Resolution on action to tackle cardiovascular disease (2007)**

- **EP Resolution on European Union position and commitment in advance of the UN high-level meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (2011)**

and specific pieces of legislation:


- **Audio Visual Media Services Directive (2007)** – for the first time ever included an article calling on member states and the Commission to encourage media service providers to develop codes of conduct regarding commercials during children’s programming with respect to unhealthy food.

- **School Fruit Scheme (2009)** – EHN used its paper on EU policies on fruit and vegetables to submit a response to this public consultation in 2008.

- **Food Information to Consumers (2011)** – with numerous EHN papers on the topic, the EC proposed mandatory nutrition labelling on back and front-of-pack in its proposal in 2008.

- **Trans fatty acids (TFA)** – after years of calling for a regulation, thanks to the MEP Heart Group and an EP resolution on trans fats, the EC published its draft proposal in October 2018, putting forward a mandatory limit of industrially produced TFA of 2g per 100g of fat.
How Will We Make CVD History?

We are a European organisation and our strategy is European - but we will have a strong focus on EU policy. We know that the greatest societal gain will be obtained by achieving a small reduction in risk factors across the population, i.e. shifting the ‘risk curve’ to the left.

The EU has an essential role to play in reducing this risk. Addressing tobacco and diet can often only be done at EU level. In addition, heart disease and stroke are the most common reasons for premature death attributable to air pollution, accounting for 80% of cases in Europe. Air pollution does not recognise borders.

Any strategy promoting cardiovascular health must address those at risk of and those already living with CVD, but also the whole population as described above.

That is why our strategy is separated into three pillars:

I. Preventing avoidable cardiovascular diseases

II. Strengthening the position of people with cardiovascular diseases

III. Reinforcing cardiovascular research

These three pillars are supported by horizontal objectives on: advocacy and awareness-raising, networking and capacity building, and cooperation/engagement with alliances.
Pillar I

**Prevent avoidable cardiovascular diseases**

**Main objective:**
create an environment in Europe that is conducive to healthy lifestyles for all, and that facilitates early detection of people at risk of CVD.

**Focus areas:**
overweight/obesity; food/nutrition; tobacco; physical activity; and high-risk conditions.

Our primary focus is on unhealthy diets; of all the behavioural risk factors, dietary factors make the largest contribution to the population-level CVD mortality burden as well as to CVD disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost.

In concrete terms, EHN will continue to engage actively with tobacco control activities by supporting organisations specialised in this policy area, and will address physical (in)activity through the collection of evidence in support of its members’ activities. EHN will also support activities on reducing air pollution.

Pillar II

**Strengthen the position of people with cardiovascular diseases**

**Main objective:**
enable people with cardiovascular diseases to actively manage their disease, so that they may live to an old age with a good quality of life.

**Focus areas:**
self-help; patients as lobbyists/advocates; engaging patients with research.

EHN will act as a convenor, bringing together its members to share best practice and ensure they benefit from each other’s experiences. Of particular interest will be addressing gender inequalities and a greater uptake of work with patients among our members.
**Pillar III**

**Reinforce cardiovascular research**

**Main objective:**

improve awareness of the need for CVD research.

**Focus areas:**

knowledge gathering and sharing; education and communication.

EHN will create a mechanism which allows EHN research-funding members to review and assess their research priorities and seek to influence the EU research framework programme and its implementation, ensuring funding opportunities for CVD research.

**Horizontal objectives**

In order to further our objectives, we will seek to bolster EHN’s unique strengths of advocacy, awareness-raising, networking and capacity-building, as well as our organisational strengths, by building our membership across Europe and working even more effectively with our members. We will also strengthen cooperation with our partners and continue to work in alliances.
The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of foundations and associations dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke and supporting patients throughout Europe. Its ambition is to create an environment in which the healthier choice becomes the easier choice and that offers the best possible medical care and support for patients throughout their illness.

More information about EHN is available at: http://www.ehnheart.org/