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High-Level Conference on Cardiovascular Health - 4 July 2024, Budapest

The High-Level Conference on Cardiovascular Health was held with the participation of the European Society of Cardiology, representatives from EU Member States, EU institutions, civil society, academy and other stakeholders.

Given that cardiovascular diseases constitute the leading cause of death in Europe and worldwide today, the aim of the conference was to bring together Europe's leading experts to search solutions and facilitate cooperation in combating cardiovascular diseases.

The four priority topics addressed at the conference were primary prevention, secondary prevention, treatment and innovation, and rehabilitation and patient-centred support. During a ministerial discussion, participating high-level delegates from several Member States had the opportunity to present their national programmes and priorities in this field.

A number of important messages were articulated: Taking proactive and reactive actions are equally essential when maintaining cardiovascular health. Investing in prevention is rather urgent and beneficial, since a great proportion of cardiovascular diseases could be avoided by primary and secondary prevention and regular health checks. At the same time, the exploration of innovative and affordable treatment options, as well as a shift to a patient-centered and integrated model of rehabilitation services is also crucial for the promotion of physical, mental, social and economic well-being of patients.

High-level Conference on Organ Donation and Transplantation, 11 July, Budapest

The high-level conference on organ donation and transplantation was held with the participation of representatives from EU Member States, the World Health Organization, experts in transplantation and was convened to discuss achievements, current challenges and opportunities for enhanced European cooperation. The aim of the conference was to renew the EU action plan for organ donation and transplantation, reflecting on the 2009-2015 EU plan's success and aiming to further increase donor numbers. The conference slogan, *“Every life-saving transplant starts with a donor’s decision,”* underscored Hungary’s commitment to advancing collaborative efforts in this field.

Key discussions were held on improving efficiency and outcomes in organ donation processes, enhancing regulatory frameworks, and tackling inequalities in transplant access across Europe. Topics covered enhancing coordination among member states, providing support for under-resourced transplant systems, and implementing new strategies to improve donor-recipient compatibility. Best practice from Spanish national model was shared as well to inspire broader improvements in organ donation and transplantation outcomes. Participants also acknowledged challenges such as data sharing, donor-recipient compatibility, and logistical issues, underscoring the necessity of sustained commitment at both national and EU levels.

The conference further explored the role of funding, research, and technological advancements, while the importance of sustained training for healthcare professionals, public awareness initiatives, and ethical guidelines to ensure safer and more effective organ donation practices across Europe were also emphasized. Concluding with a roundtable, participants discussed strategic priorities, including the need for EU-wide standards, regulatory updates, and a focus on addressing inequalities in transplant access to ensure that more patients benefit from life-saving organ donations across Europe.

High-level Policy Dialogue on Mental Health and the Triple Planetary Crisis, 7 October, Brussels

The high-level conference, organized by the Hungarian EU Presidency and WHO Regional Office for Europe, addressed the mental health impacts of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. The event brought together experts and policymakers to examine these environmental crises' disproportionate effects on vulnerable groups, including youth and individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions. The opening session addressed the severe mental health consequences link to the extreme weather events and chronic environmental issues, referring to the Budapest Declaration and recent initiatives linking mental and environmental health.

The following sessions focused on evidence-based actions to mitigate the mental health impacts of the triple planetary crisis on the general public and health workers. Case studies highlighted how some countries are successfully integrating mental health considerations into climate and health policies. Experts emphasized the importance of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in emergency preparedness, especially for those affected by extreme weather events and public health crises. The conference concluded with a call to action, where representatives discussed key takeaways, aiming to strengthen policies that support mental resilience and equitable responses to environmental challenges across Europe.

Chief Medical, Nursing, and Dental Officers Meeting, 7-8 October 2024, Budapest

A professional meeting of Chief Medical Officers, Chief Nurses, and Chief Dental Officers from the EU Member States, EFTA Member States, and the United Kingdom was held in Budapest on October 7-8, 2024.

The event focused on key topics such as antimicrobial resistance, the current status of Mpox spread, and the crucial role of mental health prevention. The agenda also emphasized the importance of infection control, particularly hand hygiene, in the post-pandemic era of COVID-19. Additionally, a separate session addressed the health consequences of the triple environmental crisis—climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss—as well as changes in the dental care system, with a special focus on prevention and paediatric dentistry. The latest trends and best practices in dental prevention was showcased, including the integration of technology and data analytics to enhance patients' quality of life.

This peer consultation offered a platform for leading experts from the region to discuss pressing public health issues. It also provided an opportunity for participating countries to highlight key topics and share their most significant findings with their peers.

Innovative Technologies In Healthcare: AI And Beyond, 19 November 2024, Brussels

The seminar on “Innovative Technologies in Healthcare: AI and beyond” was hosted by the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union at the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union in Brussels on 19 November 2024 in a hybrid form.

The meeting served as a platform to highlight recent advancements in the application of AI in healthcare, explore potential future directions for AI-enhanced healthcare systems and examine policies, actions, and resource availability based on evidence. Representatives from Member States, including policymakers, national experts and health attachés, EU Commission officials, clinicians, researchers and other stakeholders participated in the event.

Invited speakers discussed the pathways for bringing emerging breakthrough medical devices and innovative technologies to market, focusing on regulatory challenges, investment barriers, and the potential role of public-private partnerships. They also explored the use of regulatory sandboxes as controlled environments for the development, testing, and validation of AI-enabled medical devices, while examining potential benefits beyond AI and ensuring compliance with EU regulations.

Altogether, six presentations were lined up by some of the top experts in the field, including university professors, doctors, IT specialists, and officials from the European Commission. The presentations addressed EU regulatory innovation, AI in medicine, advanced digital decision support for oncology and cardiology, the development of novel therapeutic solutions, and data-driven healthcare. The speakers' insights highlighted the latest advancements, challenges, and opportunities brought forth in the healthcare space by artificial intelligence and other transformative technologies.

In addition, two panel sessions provided a platform for inspiring discussions and diverse perspectives on the subject. Panelists from leading healthcare organizations and EU bodies shared valuable insights on AI advancements and practical applications in healthcare.

The event further expanded on the challenges and key enablers in deploying AI within clinical practice. It addressed the ways healthcare providers could navigate the landscape of available AI solutions, determine the best fit for their specific environments, and identify the necessary skills and training for effective implementation. Finally, strategies for demonstrating the added value of AI, fostering trust and acceptance among healthcare professionals and patients, and monitoring AI usage and impact have also been covered.

The seminar offered valuable insights as participants explored cutting-edge advancements in AI and their practical applications, while also serving as a strong reminder of the crucial role of collaboration in ensuring healthcare innovations are delivered to patients safely and effectively.

For an EU commitment to tackle rare diseases, 29 November 2024, Budapest

A major conference titled “*For an EU commitment to tackle rare diseases*” takes place at the Budapest Congress Centre. The event builds on two earlier successful conferences organized by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC): one in October 2023 in Bilbao under the Spanish Presidency, focused on rare diseases and European Reference Networks, and another in March 2024 in Brussels, under the Belgian Presidency, in collaboration with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, titled “*Rare Diseases in the EU: Shaping the Future of European Reference Networks Through Joint Action*”.

In the Budapest conference the EESC will present its exploratory opinion, “*Leaving No One Behind: European Commitment to Combat Rare Diseases*” prepared at the request of our Presidency. The opinion urges the European Commission to develop a communication on a Rare Diseases Action Plan as part of its new mandate for 2025-2029. The proposed plan aims to ensure that patients with rare diseases could be diagnosed within one year of the onset of symptoms.

The event brings together a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, patient groups, health professionals, researchers, hospital leaders, representatives of health ministries and EU institutions. This diverse participation ensures continuity in the work and political commitment that EU Member States and civil society organizations have pursued since 2004.

The conference is expected to develop recommendations, alongside the key conclusions of the exploratory opinion. The goal is to promote the creation of a European policy framework for rare diseases that would lead to a coordinated strategy across research, digital technologies, healthcare and social protection. This framework would complement existing legislation and encourage further investments in rare diseases at both EU and national levels.

The Presidency and the EESC will be calling on the new European Commission and EU Member States to propose and implement a comprehensive European Action Plan for Rare Diseases, setting common, measurable objectives to improve the treatment of rare diseases and enhance European collaboration in this field.