Non-communicable diseases

2023/2075(INI) - 17/11/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report by Erik POULSEN (Renew, DK) on non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

The report noted that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are diseases that are not passed from person to person. They cause 90 % of all deaths in the EU, account for 80 % of the health burden in EU countries and their prevalence continues to grow across the EU.

Moreover, premature deaths as a result of cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), cancers, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases account for 68 % of all premature deaths in Europe.

Improved health promotion and disease prevention can reduce the prevalence of NCDs by as much as 70%.

NCD prevention

Members stressed that it is important to prevent and reduce the prevalence of NCDs through **early diagnosis and screening**, better access to public healthcare, and through better disease management and treatment.

Member States are also encouraged to develop, implement and monitor national NCD plans and strategies, in particular for the most prevalent diseases with high mortality and morbidity rates.

Highlighting that 60 % of children are exposed to second-hand smoke at home which can lead to sudden infant death syndrome, lower respiratory infections, ear infections and more severe asthma, the EU and the Member States are called on to ensure greater protection of non-smokers from second-hand smoke and to develop campaigns in order to create a smoke-free environment and to raise the first tobacco-free EU generation by 2040.

Members also called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- promote **smoking cessation** and implement measures to help tobacco users quit and follow up on the scientific research and evaluations by public health authorities on the health risks related to electronic cigarettes, particularly taking into consideration the threat posed to non-smokers, children and youth;

- protect minors from commercial communications on **alcohol consumption**;

- encourage and help consumers to make informed and **healthy choices** about food products, empowering them to follow healthy, varied and balanced diets;

- propose a new, comprehensive and integrated EU action plan for **obesity** with benchmarks, indicators and mechanisms to monitor and guarantee results;

- promote physical activity and the practice of **sports** in urban planning as an accessible and widely available means of reducing the risk factors for NCDs;

Identification of high-risk populations and early diagnosis of NCDs

The report pointed out that many people living with NCDs in Europe are undiagnosed and unaware of their illness, and, thus, fail to get proper, timely treatment. The Commission should collect examples of best practices regarding screening for and early detection of NCDs. NCD prevention and management can help lighten the burden of NCDs on healthcare systems and strengthen their resilience in the face of health crises.

Member States are encouraged to introduce **targeted health checks** for high-risk individuals and promote self-sampling to address the main shared metabolic risk factors such as high blood pressure, high blood glucose, high BMI and high LDL cholesterol.

Improving NCD healthcare

Stressing that healthcare professionals, patient organisations and the third sector at large play a significant role in referring patients for early diagnostic tests and treating NCDs, the report encouraged Member States to ensure continued patient access to primary and secondary care, and to offer inter-professional training to healthcare professionals in order to better recognise at-risk individuals and to better prevent, identify and treat NCDs.

The report also stressed the importance of accessible and cost-effective healthcare, so that limited resources are put to the best use and provided to the patients in most need.

The valuable role of community pharmacies is stressed in continuously providing essential services to support the treatment of NCDs and to keep the general public informed.

Members called for the adoption of an EU strategy to anticipate and monitor the impacts of serious health threats on people affected by communicable diseases and NCDs, and other diseases or conditions. They proposed exploring the possibility of creating an emergency reserve of European NCD specialists, composed of voluntary NCD experts trained and ready to be deployed to provide care to people living with NCDs in any Member State or neighbouring country in times of crisis.

Patient empowerment and health literacy are also crucial in preventing NCDs.

Lastly, **digital health** solutions are strongly welcomed which can enable better access to healthcare in rural areas and protect immunosuppressed NCD patients from exposure to infectious diseases.