Non-communicable diseases

2023/2075(INI) - 13/12/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 578 votes to 39, with 15 abstentions, a resolution on non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Members recalled 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. NCDs account for the largest share of Member States' healthcare expenditures, resulting in an estimated cost of EUR 115 billion, or 0.8 % of GDP annually.

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

NCD prevention

Tobacco use, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity and harmful use of alcohol and environmental factors such as air, food, water and soil pollution, noise pollution, UV radiation or exposure to chemicals, as well as the socio-economic determinants of health, considerably increase the risk of NCDs.

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.

These plans should not simply aim to reverse the trend in the number of people suffering from NCDs, but also to **improve the quality of life and well-being** of those affected. The Commission and the Member States should also set up public awareness campaigns on the prevention of NCDs.

Parliament 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 (tobacco use was responsible for 1.6 million deaths in Europe in 2019 and 60% of children are exposed to second-hand smoke at home);

- protect minors from commercial communications on **alcohol consumption** and improve the labelling of alcoholic beverages, in particular by including moderate and responsible drinking information (one in ten deaths in the WHO European Region results from alcohol use, or about 1 million deaths every year);

- 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;

- protect people from exposure to **environmental risks**, both in their daily lives and in their working environment (reducing the use of pesticides and implementing effective waste disposal mechanisms that avoid polluting the environment).

Pointing out that comorbidities, including HIV infection, diabetes, hypertension, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases, were particular risk factors during the COVID-19 pandemic, Members stressed that specialised treatments should be integrated into primary and national healthcare systems, in order to prepare for future pandemics.

Identification of high-risk populations and early diagnosis of NCDs

The resolution 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, Members 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 resolution 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 also 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 key to preventing non-communicable diseases.

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.