

## PRESS RELEASE

### The cardiovascular legacy of COVID-19 - the time for the EU to act is now

Brussels, 25 June 2020. Today, the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and the European Heart Network (EHN) launch “**Fighting cardiovascular disease – a blueprint for EU action**”, in a virtual meeting with the European Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides and Members of the European Parliament.

The call for bold and urgent action by the EU to address the increasing burden of cardiovascular disease (CVD) is even more urgent in the context of COVID-19. Before the outbreak, the burden of CVD was already greater than that of any other disease and the leading cause of death in Europe and in the world. The pandemic will make this already gloomy scenario worse.

More than 60 million people live with CVD in the EU, and close to 13 million new cases of CVD are diagnosed every year. CVD accounts for 36% of all deaths and is a major cause of premature death, with around 20% of the mortality before the age of 65 caused by CVD in the EU.

With the deadly link between COVID-19 and cardiovascular disease being established, there is no time to waste if we do not want to see CVD mortality and morbidity skyrocket for the following reasons:

- Heart disease is among the most common pre-existing health conditions in people who die infected by the virus
- COVID-19 triggers an inflammatory response which can damage the heart and blood vessels, and increase the risk of blood clotting, leading to heart attacks, strokes and pulmonary embolism
- During the outbreak, emergency hospital admissions for heart attacks and strokes have halved, leaving many people dying at home or suffering devastating damage to their heart or brain
- The postponement of heart surgeries and other elective procedures has also led to an increase in preventable death and disability and a waiting time backlog which will be difficult to reabsorb.

“Fighting cardiovascular disease – a blueprint for EU action” provides a range of actions to address the increasing burden of CVD and improve the care and treatment for patients, by putting in place a programme spanning across policy, research and regulation.

Present at the launch of the document, European Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said: “Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in EU and the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of well-functioning health systems and the need for us to take action. The new stand-alone EU4Health program is a game changer, putting health as priority for the EU and rising to the challenges posed by the pandemic. It will address the needs of those living with cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases.”

Prof Barbara Casadei, President of the ESC added: “The COVID-19 crisis has shown that the availability of accurate and rapidly accessible patient data can inform health policies in an emergency and avoid preventable death and disability. This must be achieved across Europe through the development of harmonised continuous patient registries and the digitisation of our health systems. Such data would also allow effective monitoring of the safety of medical devices, increase the speed and efficiency of randomised controlled trials, and thus, of access to new treatments, and bring industry investment to Europe”.

EHN President, Floris Italianer affirmed: “Because of the scale of the disease and the many risk factors and lifestyle determinants, cardiovascular disease is best described as a societal disease. As such, effective regulation and population-wide interventions are necessary to prevent it. Improvements in cardiovascular patients’ care and treatment are also needed. The EU has the competence and the tools to act, we just need the political will. A strong push to address Europe’s leading cause of death will in turn lead to better human and economic outcomes with considerable returns on investment.”

Co-Chair of the MEP Heart Group Maria da Graça Carvalho MEP commented: “There are still so many areas of unmet needs in CVD. The new EU Framework Programme for Research Horizon Europe should support investment in cardiovascular research and innovation covering from basic to translational clinical research allowing for new discoveries that can have a significant impact on the burden of cardiovascular diseases and have a significant impact on the lives of millions of people”.

Co-Chair of the MEP Heart Group Brando Benifei MEP said: “There are huge geographical and social inequalities in CVD mortality across the Europe. It is unacceptable that if you live in Bulgaria you are 8 times at greater risk of dying from stroke compared to someone living in France. The EU has a moral duty to act to address these inequalities with policy and regulatory interventions but also facilitating the exchange of good practices between Member States”.