

**Open Letter to Mr. José Manuel Barroso**  
President European Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 14 May 2013

Dear President Barroso,

We are the **European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA)** – an alliance of 10 organisations representing over 100,000 health professionals and millions of patients.

We write to you again now because we are concerned about the lack of political will with regard to chronic diseases from the leadership of the European Union. This is notwithstanding the ground-breaking political declaration that Heads of State adopted in September 2011 during the General Assembly of the **United Nations on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases**. Not to mention – closer to home – the **EU Council Conclusions on Innovative approaches for chronic diseases in public health and healthcare systems (2010)** and the **European Parliament's Resolution (2011)**<sup>1</sup>.

**25 by 25** is a target that the World Health Assembly signed up to last May (2012). It is a target of a **25% reduction in premature mortality from chronic non-communicable diseases by 2025**. This target is not a target for the health ministers of the world; it is a target for all politicians. The European Union will only deliver on this target if it commits to a long-term, dedicated strategy for the prevention of chronic diseases. Without this, our citizens will continue to suffer the debilitating effects of these diseases which all too often lead to premature death.

The overarching target referred to above will be accompanied by specific targets, **including a 30% relative reduction in mean population intake of salt/sodium, a 10% relative reduction in harmful use of alcohol, and a 30% relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15+ years**. Policies to achieve these targets fall well within the regulatory competence of the European Union.

Inaction will have disastrous outcomes – both in terms of Healthy Life Years lost and continued strains on healthcare systems. Chronic diseases cost economies immensely, through medical and social care needs, as well as through impact of premature retirement and reduced work force productivity. In a statement in August 2011, ECDA said that robust action to prevent and control chronic diseases “... will not be an emergency bailout but a long-term investment in the most valued primary resource: people.” Presiding over an economic downturn is difficult but EU initiatives and legislative measures have great potential to help reversing chronic diseases (meeting the targets referred to above).

<sup>1</sup> of 15 September 2011 on European Union position and commitment in advance to the UN high-level meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases

# ecda

United to reverse the rise in chronic disease

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chronic  
disease  
alliance

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EUROPEAN  
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and stroke  
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HEALTH ALLIANCE

International  
Diabetes Federation  
Europe

ECC  
European COPD Coalition

ESH  
European  
Society of  
Hypertension

Notably, we were concerned about the very considerable time it took the European Commission to adopt its proposal for a recast of the Tobacco Products Directive. We also observe that a proposal for **nutrient profiles** in the context of the nutrition and health claims regulation has not yet been published, despite being planned for January 2009. We are above all awaiting a strong political signal on chronic diseases from the European Commission: a proposal for a **European Union Strategy and Action Plan on Chronic Diseases**, including recommendations to address the major health risk factors: poor nutrition, alcohol and tobacco consumption and physical inactivity. We look forward to seeing substantial progress before the end of your second term.

We are sure you are aware of the burden of chronic diseases and the impact it has not only on people but on the economy. To emphasise and highlight the necessity to take action on the matter, here are some figures:

- up to **40%** of the EU population aged over 15 report a long-standing health problem related to chronic diseases
- **up to 80%** of health-care expenses are allocated to chronic diseases – in other words costs of chronic diseases are in the billions of euros every year; cardiovascular diseases alone are estimated to cost the EU economy 196 billion euros (health and non-health costs) every year
- chronic diseases to cost the world **\$ 47 trillion** by 2030 in lost output.

It is also worth noting that although the European Union has a high average life expectancy, namely 79.4 years, **healthy life years expectancy is 61.45 years**. This difference of 18 years is not a positive sign for governments wishing to postpone retirement age until 65 years of age or older!

There is still time to pick up the chronic disease challenge and reverse the alarming projections of chronic diseases and the downward trend in the number of people in the workforce by 2020. To do so, prevention of chronic diseases must be placed right up there next to the prevention of economic ill health. We are ready to help.

Yours faithfully,

*The European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)*

*The European CanCER Organisation (ECCO)*

*The European COPD Coalition (ECC)*

*The European Heart Network (EHN)*

*The European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA)*

*The European Respiratory Society (ERS)*

*The European Society of Cardiology (ESC)*

*The European Society of Hypertension (ESH)*

*The European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO)*

*The International Diabetes Federation Europe (IDF-Europe)*