

**To:**

Ministers responsible for Health and their related Permanent Representations to the European Union

**Cc:** Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

OPEN LETTER

Brussels, 4 November 2020

**Subject: Call for alignment of the Council with the European Parliament and European Commission in implementing obesity as a key NCD as part of the EU4Health Programme and beyond**

Dear Ministers and Permanent Representatives to the European Union,

In light of the European Council's opening position for negotiations of the next phases of the EU4Health Programme, the undersigned MEPs and 38 stakeholder organisations comprising major health policy stakeholders at European, national and regional level would like to express our deep concern at the positioning of obesity only as a lifestyle risk factor on a par with tobacco and alcohol.

The World Health Organisation has long since classified obesity as a disease, **defined as abnormal or excessive adiposity which may lead to ill health**<sup>1</sup>. Increasing numbers of EU Member States have declared obesity as a chronic disease and initiated strategies for the primary prevention, treatment, long term management and control of obesity as with other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Of note, **Portugal** was the first country in the EU to do so in 2000. **Italy**<sup>2</sup> followed in 2019 and most recently **the German Parliament** declared obesity as a chronic disease earlier on this year<sup>3</sup>.

COVID-19 has focused our minds on ways to protect those most likely to be adversely affected by contracting COVID-19. **The European Commission's Communication on COVID-19 Preparedness specifically categorises obesity as a medical vulnerability due to a pre-existing medical condition**<sup>4</sup>.

**The European Commission's Foresight Report (published 9 September 2020) specifically prioritises the "two NCDs, obesity and cancer" as top challenges and priorities for the coming period**<sup>5</sup>. The European Parliament (at Committee stage) passed CA 10 which inter alia explicitly includes obesity as a chronic disease on a par with cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (WHO) definition. Available at: [https://www.who.int/health-topics/obesity#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/obesity#tab=tab_1)

<sup>2</sup> European Association for the Study of Obesity - Obesity now recognised as a chronic disease in Italy. Available at: <https://easo.org/obesity-is-a-chronic-disease-italy/>

<sup>3</sup> European Association for the Study of Obesity - German parliament recognises obesity as a disease. July 2020. Available at: <https://easo.org/german-parliament-recognises-obesity-as-a-disease/>

<sup>4</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks. July 2020. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication\\_-\\_short-term\\_eu\\_health\\_preparedness.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_-_short-term_eu_health_preparedness.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> European Commission 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. September 2020. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic\\_foresight\\_report\\_2020\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic_foresight_report_2020_1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> European Parliament. Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. Compromise Amendment 10. October 2020. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014\\_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/ENVI/DV/2020/10-12/1209604\\_CA\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/ENVI/DV/2020/10-12/1209604_CA_EN.pdf)

We call on the Council to align with other EU and international institutions as you move through the next stages of the EU4Health and broader Multi-Annual Financial Framework negotiation process.

**Including obesity as an NCD will save lives. 51.6% of people living in EU Member States currently live with pre-obesity or obesity<sup>7</sup>.** Research demonstrates that for those with pre-obesity (overweight) or obesity, the more severe, the higher the correlation with a bad outcome from COVID-19. Studies have demonstrated that in some cases, those with obesity are **113% more likely than people of healthy weight to land in the hospital, 74% more likely to be admitted to an ICU, and 48% more likely to die<sup>8</sup>.**

The science speaks for itself. The totality of the evidence suggests that addressing obesity as a chronic relapsing disease could **prevent 80% of Type 2 Diabetes<sup>9</sup>**. Furthermore, it could also prevent up to 20% of adult cancers<sup>10</sup> - including cancers of the colon, rectum, breast, endometrium, liver, kidney; all priorities of the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

We, the undersigned, strongly urge you to align with science and policy consensus. Treating obesity as an NCD will save lives, and importantly, will play an integral role in the overall recovery of the EU and our economy as part of the new reality.

We therefore call on the Council to align with the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the scientific community and categorise obesity as a chronic, relapsing disease. We ask the Council to take this opportunity to reassess how to achieve desired health outcomes and to particularly focus on a holistic person-centred approach to the chronic disease of obesity and its related complications.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

The undersigned remain willing to contribute and provide our expertise to the discussion.

Yours sincerely,

*MEP Pernille WEISS, Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), European Parliament*

*MEP Biljana BORZAN, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, European Parliament*

*MEP Sara CERDAS, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, European Parliament*

*MEP Linea SØGAARD-LIDELL, Renew Europe Group, European Parliament*

*MEP Nicolae ŞTEFĂNUŢĂ, Renew Europe Group, European Parliament*

*MEP Jutta PAULUS, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, European Parliament*

*European Association for the Study of Obesity*

*OPEN-EU (Obesity Policy Engagement Network – EU)\**

*The EU Health Coalition\**

*World Obesity Federation (WOF)*

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<sup>7</sup> Eurostat. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Overweight\\_and\\_obesity\\_-\\_BMI\\_statistics#:~:text=Context,in%20Europe%20and%20the%20Americas](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Overweight_and_obesity_-_BMI_statistics#:~:text=Context,in%20Europe%20and%20the%20Americas)

<sup>8</sup> Popkin et al., Obesity Reviews, 2020. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/obr.13128>

<sup>9</sup> Diabetes and Obesity. 2019. Diabetes.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-and-obesity.html#:~:text=Links%20between%20obesity%20and%20type%20%20diabetes&text=In%20fact%2C%20obesity%20is%20believed,BMI%20of%20less%20than%2022>

<sup>10</sup> Wolin et al., The Oncologist, 2010. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3227989/#B4>

# EASO

**European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)**, established in 1986, is a federation of professional membership associations from 36 countries, with a network of over 130 specialist Collaborating Centres for Obesity Management across the region. EASO's mission is to reduce the burden of unhealthy weight, and it promotes action through collaboration in research, education and policy. EASO is in official relations with the WHO Regional Office for Europe, and represents scientists, health care practitioners, physicians, public health experts and patients.

## OPEN-EU

Obesity Policy Engagement Network



**Obesity Policy Engagement Network (OPEN)**, originally founded in 2018, is a global initiative focussed on ensuring policies support and enable access to holistic obesity care to ensure sustainable health outcomes for people living with obesity. **OPEN-EU** acts as a multistakeholder collaborative policy coalition, which seeks to ensure that all relevant European institutional strategies and policies integrate measures that effectively help support people living with obesity at EU, national and Regional levels and that the treatment of obesity as a gateway disease to type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and over 230 other complications of obesity is accessible to all. EASO (European Association for the Study of Obesity) hosts the Expert Secretariat for OPEN-EU.

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**The EU Health Coalition**, established in 2018, promotes a shared vision of health in Europe, based on jointly developed recommendations. The purpose is to ensure that health remains high on the political agenda and to champion the changes required to address the unprecedented challenges that an ageing population and an increasing prevalence of chronic diseases pose to healthcare systems and citizens. The EU Health Coalition is composed of patient organisations, EU research-oriented medical societies, industry organisations, healthcare providers, regional and local health authorities and other relevant stakeholders, who all share a common vision.

**\*The following 38 organisations are represented by OPEN-EU and the EU Health Coalition:**

Active Citizen Network	European Confederation of Pharmaceutical Entrepreneurs (EUCOPE)
AESGP (Voice of European Self-Care Industry)	European Union of Private Hospitals (UEHP)
All.Can (Belgian cancer care community)	European Regional and Local Health Authorities (EUREGHA)
BBMRI-ERIC - European research infrastructure for biobanking	EuropaBio
BioMed Alliance	European Alliance for Access to Safe Medicines
COCIR (European Trade Association representing the medical imaging, radiotherapy, health ICT and electromedical industries)	European Health Management Association (EHMA)
Digestive Cancers Europe	EURORDIS: Rare diseases Europe
The Digital Health Society	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANSTA)
European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)	European Healthcare Distribution Association (GIRP)
European Brain Council (EBC)	Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe (GAMIAN – Europe)
European Connected Health Alliance (ECH Alliance)	International Diabetes Federation – Europe (IDF – Europe)
European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC)	International Patient Organisation for Primary Immunodeficiencies (IPOPI)
European Coalition of Patients Living with Obesity (ECPO)	Merck Group
European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD)	Novo Nordisk
European Federation of Internal Medicine (EFIM)	Plasma Protein Therapeutics Association (PPTA)
European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA)	Self-Care in Europe (SCiE)
European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA)	Senior International Health Association (SIHA)
European Multiple Sclerosis Platform	World Federation for Incontinence and Pelvic Problems (WFIPP)
European Patients Forum (EPF)	Youth Cancer Europe

