

Chronic Disease Management

Aim for an Innovative Policy “Cure”

The European Parliament Conference on Chronic Diseases organised jointly by the Belgian Presidency of the European Union and Health First Europe brought together policymakers, industry innovators and patient organisations to discuss how best to manage chronic disease care. Sponsored by European Parliament Members Kathleen Van Brempt (Belgium, S&D) and Miroslav Mikolasik (Slovakia, EPP), panellists focused on the barriers and opportunities for the healthcare industry in terms of chronic disease management and emphasized the need for investment in innovative healthcare solutions in order to, as MEP Mikolaski declared, “Add years to life, and life to years.”

Speakers at the conference highlighted the work achieved under the Belgian Presidency with regards to chronic disease management and accentuated the need to ensure the social aspects of any medical policy in terms of patient care. Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, Laurette Onkelinx, reiterated that discussions of health policy must integrate both medical and social perspectives and called upon Member States to work together to identify and share best practices for innovative healthcare policies.

Belgian Presidency representative Jo de Cock from the Institut national d’assurance maladie-invalidité, supported the statements of the Minister by declaring that concrete initiatives are needed in order to stimulate innovative approaches for the prevention of chronic diseases. He also advised that policy prescriptions need to be patient-centered and concentrated on ensuring life as normal, increasing awareness of chronic diseases and focused on the *capacity* of the chronically ill rather than the incapacity. Robert Johnstone, Member of the Governing Board of the International Alliance of Patients Organizations, fully agreed with Mr. de Cock and asserted that patients dealing with chronic illnesses need to be more involved in the policy process as concerns for access to prevention, patient safety, and access to quality information and care is of the utmost importance to those suffering from such diseases.

Technology and the ability to create innovative healthcare solutions was at the forefront of the conference and Eucomed CEO John Wilkinson was enthusiastic about the potential for technology to reduce the recovery time for patients and to contribute to a more productive healthcare system. He suggested that we need to change notions so that “innovation is viewed as opportunity rather than cost.” In order to allow for patient access to innovation, legislation such as the Directive on the Application of Patients' Rights in Cross-border Healthcare needs to be implemented as discussed by MEP Nessa Childers (Ireland, S&D). MEP Childers pointed out that the Directive would provide patients (particularly those with chronic diseases) to seek out cross-border care and to receive and be reimbursed for hospital care other Member States. Additionally, the legislation would also permit the cross-border recognition of prescriptions lessening the burden on patients working and living abroad.

Overall, the conference illustrated the role the European institutions can play in establishing a successful and innovative platform for chronic disease management across the EU. Incorporating all stakeholders in the process, including patients, medical professionals, industry and policymakers will provide the necessary foundation for using innovative technologies to diagnose and manage chronic

diseases in an economically viable way. As Mr. Wilkinson declared, “Health is wealth” and investing in better care will continue to benefit European society in terms of life expectancies, productivity and general well-being.