



**STELLA KYRIAKIDES**  
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Rue de la Loi, 200  
B-1049 Brussels – Berl 10/380  
[stella.kyriakides@ec.europa.eu](mailto:stella.kyriakides@ec.europa.eu)

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Dear Honourable Members,

Thank you for your letter dated 29 September 2020 calling for a Joint Action on Structural Heart Disease.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses additional, multiple, challenges to people living with pre-existing conditions such as structural heart disease. It has put these patients at risk, not only because their condition increases their risk of developing serious illness, if they get infected with COVID-19, but also because their regular healthcare may be put on hold due to the additional load COVID-19, causes in Health Systems of some Member States. At the same time, I am well aware, that social distancing measures may severely limit contact with carers and loved ones. Therefore, your concern for patients with structural heart disease, is one shared with the Commission and me personally.

The Commission approaches the challenge that non-communicable diseases, including structural heart disease, which affect European citizens, by focusing on prevention across sectors and policy fields, combined with efforts to strengthen health systems. In order to address these challenges, the Commission has set up a Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases to support countries by fostering exchanges of relevant experience, policies and good practices between Member States.

Mr Brando Benifei  
Member of the European Parliament

E-mail: [brando.benifei@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:brando.benifei@europarl.europa.eu)

Ms Maria da Graça Carvalho  
Member of the European Parliament

E-mail: [maria.carvalho@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:maria.carvalho@europarl.europa.eu)

Furthermore, the Commission's Joint Actions are set up depending on the different annual work plans and priorities defined by the Member States. The ongoing Joint Action, CHRODIS+ focuses on national initiatives to reduce the burden that cardiovascular diseases pose to European citizens and to increase the sustainability of health systems and develop human capital.

To decrease the impact of non-communicable diseases on individuals and society, and to reduce premature mortality, I believe it is extremely important to focus on prevention and in efforts to strengthen health systems. For this purpose, the Commission has proposed a stand-alone health programme, which is planned to have a major increase in funding to help address the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the new EU4Health programme proposal has not yet been adopted, it is premature to indicate in which areas future projects might be considered. Saying that, however, I do count on your support and fruitful cooperation in this regard and also in addressing the various challenges of people living with pre-existing conditions such as structural heart disease.

Yours sincerely,

