

Tackling The Burden Of Structural Heart Disease In Europe

Structural Heart Disease: a significant burden only preventable through early detection

Structural Heart Diseases (SHD) are structural abnormalities of the heart leading to impaired functioning. Though some forms of SHD are congenital, impacting younger population, the majority are degenerative, primarily affecting older people. SHD can also be both debilitating and deadly for patients, with severe untreated cases having a worse prognosis than some cancers.

It's estimated that 14 million people in Europe were living with SHD in 2020, and that by 2040, this will increase to 20 million, mostly due to the ageing European population. Recent estimates indicate that every year, more 50 000 Europeans die from Heart Valve Disease only.

A degenerative disease that can generally not be prevented, SHD needs to be detected early to allow patients to benefit from treatments that will reduce mortality, prevent heart failure and improve quality of life, and reduce healthcare costs.

Detection can simply be put in place with a heart check using a stethoscope, and/or an echocardiography. Unfortunately heart checks are not routine in Europe meaning that many citizens may be asymptomatic, but still suffer from the disease without knowing it.

Structural Heart Disease: a challenge for Healthy Ageing

The senior population in Europe is about to experience a rapid growth in the next years with a corresponding vast increase in prevalence of SHD.



As Europe's population continues to age, the increasing burden of SHD poses a challenge to healthy and active ageing, increasing premature mortality as well. The difference between having SHD and being disease free can mean the difference between living a fully independent life and not being able to make it up a flight of stairs. SHD is also linked to inequalities (gender, socio-economic, geographic). Without effective treatment and intervention, its impact will only become higher.

It is imperative to adapt health policies and systems to this reality, allocating resources and strategically planning healthcare services catering to the needs of ageing population. There is a pressing need to address the burden of SHD among the elderly, and the youth, mitigating its impact and improving their well-being.

Healthy Hearts, Healthy Life & Ageing Manifesto Commitments

If I am elected in the European Parliament elections in 2024, during my mandate I will work towards making the fight against Structural Heart Diseases a priority in the European Union, to ensure there is a real change in research, diagnosis and care, to curb the trend and promote cardiovascular health and healthy ageing. I will aim at ensuring that the European Union takes appropriate action by:

- Addressing Europe's demographic shift with the right resources to detect and manage debilitating age-related conditions.
- Developing an EU Cardiovascular Health Plan (CVD), including an EU wide target for early detection of CVD including SHD.
- Calling for systematic targeted heart checks in community and primary care, to address inequalities in detection and access to treatment of SHD.
- Supporting the development of heart disease plans in Member States that reduce the preventable burden of this disease through awareness campaigns, prevention, detection and treatment.
- Prioritising the early detection and treatment of CVD and SHD in policies and funding, as an enabler of healthcare systems sustainability in a context of healthcare workforce shortages and capacity issue.

