

Towards EU Council Conclusions on Cardiovascular Disease:

Ensuring Early Detection of Structural Heart Disease for Active and Healthy Ageing



The current Council Presidency prioritises developing EU Council Conclusions on Cardiovascular Health, emphasizing a comprehensive approach to Cardiovascular Diseases (CVDs) across Europe. As part of this commitment, it strongly supports an EU Cardiovascular Health Plan to address these critical health issues.

- A significant subset of CVD is **Structural Heart Disease (SHD)** which affects the heart's valves, walls, and chambers. **If left undiagnosed and untreated, SHD can lead to debilitating symptoms and increased mortality.** In 2020, 14 million people in Europe were living with SHD, this will increase to 20 million by 2040 [1].
- **These diseases are mostly degenerative and mainly affect the elderly.** Prevention measures may not be effective, but SHD **can be detected through a simple heart check.** With an ageing European population, the prevalence of SHDs is rising, placing a substantial economic burden on healthcare systems due to late diagnoses and prolonged hospitalisations.
- Additionally, significant **geographical, socioeconomic and gender inequalities hinder the improvement of SHD care** [2]. It has been documented for example, that late diagnosis and more conservative disease management leads to worse outcomes for women.[3]
- Given the EU Council discussions on Cardiovascular Health, the **EU SHD Coalition – bringing together stakeholders and experts across Europe – calls for the prioritisation of early detection of SHD as a cornerstone of any EU or national cardiovascular health strategy.** By integrating targeted SHD screening in the elderly population into routine healthcare protocols, we can foster active and healthy ageing. Leveraging technological advancements will further support this goal. **These measures can help alleviate the economic burden associated with undetected SHD cases.**[4]

1 Eurostat population projections EU28 (Last update February 2020) - D'Arcy et al. 2016, Large-Scale Community Echocardiographic Screening Reveals a Major Burden of Undiagnosed Valvular Heart Disease in Older People

2 ILC, 2023. Holding us back? Tackling inequalities in the detection and treatment of structural heart disease in Europe. Available at <https://structuralheartdiseasecoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ILC-holding-us-back.pdf>

3 Excess Mortality and Undertreatment of Women With Severe Aortic Stenosis. Tribouilloy et al. J Am Heart Assoc. 2021;10:e018816

4 ILC, 2021. The invisible epidemic. Available at <https://ilcuk.org.uk/the-invisible-epidemic/>

Towards EU Council Conclusions on Cardiovascular Disease:

Ensuring Early Detection of Structural Heart Disease for Active and Healthy Ageing



Therefore, the EU's future Council Conclusions should consider these key recommendations:

Improving Prevention of CVD Across All Ages and Genders:



Recognise age as a non-modifiable risk factor for developing CVDs, including SHDs. Implement age-specific prevention strategies to address the unique risk profiles of different age groups to enhance the effectiveness of primary prevention efforts. Gender and sex specificities should also be taken into consideration when it comes to research and breaching gaps, as evidence suggests that women tend to consult their doctor later and have more comorbidities than men.[5]

Include Early Detection in Adequate Secondary Prevention Strategies:



Strengthening primary care systems to include routine CVD/SHD screenings for individuals aged 65 and above will enhance early diagnosis rates. This integration ensures that SHD patients receive timely referrals to specialised care when needed, optimising treatment outcomes and quality of life.

Restoring CVD Innovation in the EU:



Embracing and training healthcare professionals on digital health solutions and innovative diagnostic technologies enables remote monitoring, early detection, and optimal management of SHDs. This empowers patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers, reducing complications and hospitalisations while enhancing healthcare efficiency.

The EU SHD Coalition is ready to collaborate with stakeholders to advance policies and practices supporting early detection initiatives and ensure equitable access to timely SHD care across Europe.