



## EVENT REPORT

# A concrete case to beat NCDs in Europe: Early detection of structural heart disease (SHD)

Hosted by MEPs, Brando Benifei (S&D, Italy) and Maria da Graça Carvalho (EPP, Portugal), with the support of the Structural Heart Disease Coalition

15 November 2022

16:00 – 17:30 CET

European Parliament, SPAAK 4B1 and Online



*For a Heart Health Check in Europe*

## Summary

On 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022, Members of European Parliament Brando Benifei (S&D, Italy) and Maria da Graça Carvalho (EPP, Portugal) co-hosted the hybrid event “**A concrete case to beat NCDs in Europe: Early detection of structural heart diseases (SHDs)**”.

The event brought together key EU and national politicians, policy-makers, patients and experts in the field of Structural Heart Disease, who underlined:

- The impact of Structural Heart Disease (SHD) - a non-preventable cardiovascular disease occurring due to ageing - on patients and society
- The huge under-detection and lack of awareness of the disease, and the urgent need to take action by focusing on the early detection of SHD through improved screening, as key instrument to improve people’s health.
- The window of opportunity to improve screening of SHD with the EU Non-Communicable Disease Initiative, Healthier Together, and the EU4Health Joint Action on Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes (JACARDI) **to support better screening, early detection**

### **detection and improved management of patients with Structural Heart Disease.**

- Key pilots and initiatives in various European countries (Spain, Italy, France, UK) that aim at improving screening and early detection of SHD show that SHD screening is within reach and can be successful from a population health perspective.
- The need to continue to invest more EU Funding to beat NCDs and SHD, to effectively bring about solutions in the long-term.

The EU Structural Heart Disease Coalition thanks all speakers and attendees for joining the event and joining the call to address SHD Screening and Early Detection in the forthcoming EU Joint Action on Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes, as well as future EU4Health Work Programmes. The EU Structural Heart Disease Coalition strongly supports the call from Member of European Parliament member Maria da Graça Carvalho that there is a need for an EU Plan for Cardiovascular Disease, building on the success of the Beating Cancer Plan, to tackle the burden of CVDs in general, and SHD in particular.

## Report

On Tuesday, 15 November, the hybrid event on “A concrete case to beat NCDs in Europe: Early detection of structural heart diseases (SHDs)”, hosted by MEPs, Brando Benifei (S&D, Italy) and Maria da Graça Carvalho (EPP, Portugal), with the support of the Structural Heart Disease Coalition, took place in the premises of the European Parliament between 16:00 and 17:00 CET.



***“Decisive action is needed to ensure healthy ageing for every European” – Brando Benifei, MEP***

MEP Brando Benifei, in a video message, acknowledged the important steps that have been made to address the SHDs at a European level, since the launch of the EU SHD Coalition, but highlighted that there is still room for improvement. **Patients that suffer from SHDs are still lacking access to early diagnosis and treatment due to a lack of information, gaps in the national healthcare systems, and discrimination due to their age.** Decisive action is needed to ensure healthy ageing for every European and at the same time, to support our national healthcare systems. Mr. Benifei called the attendees to join forces and demand further action from the European and national decision-makers to **address SHDs as a pillar of the European Health Union.** In an era where the European Union faces a variety of different challenges on all fronts, it must not lose sight of its essential priorities, one of them being health promotion.



***“The Commission has launched the EU NCD Initiative which includes Cardiovascular Diseases” – Véronique Wasbauer, DG SANTE***

Ms. Wasbauer, principal adviser for non-communicable diseases of DG SANTE, presented the key figures on cardiovascular diseases: before the Covid-19 pandemic, CVD was the main source of death in the European Union, with 4 million deaths per year, including 1.8 million from coronary heart disease. In addition to the human cost, **she emphasised the health costs involved, the loss of productivity and the burden on the health system as well as the “informal burden” on care givers.** After these background elements, she **highlighted the EU initiatives:** the Joint Action of Cardiovascular Diseases and Diabetes (JACARDI) and the call for proposals toward stakeholders. In addition, she recalled that the 2022 EU4Health work programme supports the implementation of actions with dedicated funding of 75 million euros for the Member States on Health determinants. **Therefore, the Commission is deploying considerable strains to tackle cardiovascular diseases in Europe, via various means and dedicated actions.**



*“When the patient comes to the hospital it is already too late. We need to focus on screening” – Dr. Héctor Bueno,*

**Scientific Coordinator of Spanish Cardiovascular Health Strategy**

Héctor Bueno, the scientific coordinator of the Spanish Cardiovascular Health Strategy, highlighted what would be the benefits of European collaboration on cardiovascular diseases. After briefly mentioning the decline in the prevalence of certain cardiovascular diseases, **he emphasised the actions that still need to be taken, particularly about the differences in prevalence and access to screening due to gender and socio-economic inequalities.** The current trends are taking shape in a health care system that he qualified as “less and less adapted” to the needs of the society, which is ageing and having more comorbidities. Patients are entering too late the health care system, which is in many cases not patient, nor person-centred, which made him ask for major changes in our health systems. **There is a need for leadership, which must come from Europe, guidance that goes beyond practices guidance and a sharing of practices and data.**



*“We have to reconsider the functioning of the national healthcare system and support research on health” – Dr. Yannick Neuder, French MP*

The cardiologist and Member of the French National Assembly, Doctor Yannick Neuder

underlined that **more action on preventing cardiovascular diseases is essential in France**, as no national plan on CVDs exist in the country. Due to high rates of smoking, diabetes, blood pressure, and high mortality rates from CVDs in certain regions, the country urgently needs a concrete action plan on addressing CVDs. On the latter, Dr. Neuder stressed that there is a lack of health services in specific regions of France, especially focusing on CVDs, as well as an alarming shortage of well-trained doctors and healthcare professionals. To this end, it is of primordial importance to reconsider the functioning of the national healthcare system and support research on health. **He concluded that focus on preventing CVDs shall be a priority for the country’s national health plan for 2023.**



*“Despite the symptoms, my GP never diagnosed me with SHD” - Léon Chriqui, patient*

Mr. Léon Chriqui, a former SHD patient, took the floor and described his personal experience of living with the disease. More specifically, he pointed out **that the symptoms of SHD, like shortness of breath, fatigue and difficulty walking beyond 100m, had a major impact on his daily life.** Chriqui stressed that his GP reassured him that he experienced the consequences of old age. He lived 10 years with the disease, without being diagnosed. Only when he proceeded to complementary medical exams, thanks to a concerned family member, was he then diagnosed with SHD, which was treated thereafter. **Mr. Chriqui underlined that after treating the disease he recovered**

the quality of life he once used to have, without suffering from the symptoms of SHD. He urged policy-makers and politicians to improve awareness and screening of the disease, to avoid that people suffer without being detected.



*“To effectively address SHDs we must think global and act local” – Prof. Paolo Magni, Italian Heart Foundation*

Professor Paolo Magni, board member of the Italian Heart Foundation, focused on the nature of SHDs and the ways of detecting them. Today, SHDs are estimated to affect up to 14 million people across Europe and it has a direct correlation with old age. It is estimated that around 6% of people aged between 65 and 74, 16% of those aged between 75 and 84, and almost one-third of those aged 85 years or more are suffering from any form of structural heart disease. Moreover, even though SHDs can generally not be prevented through a healthy lifestyle like other CVDs, no comprehensive screening program for SHD exists in Europe today, meaning that there is a massive number of undiagnosed SHD cases, associated with latent public health and economic burden. Professor Magni highlighted the essential steps to efficiently address SHDs, such as **the definition of the target population and SHD detection guidelines, programme of awareness, training and incentivization of General Practitioners to perform heart checks, development of awareness campaigns to maximize adherence to the target population, and evaluation of the use of new techniques for SHD detection (e.g., digital stethoscope and use of echocardiography as first-line screening**

tool). He concluded by calling the European Union to encourage the development of screening programs for CVD and SHD, and via the forthcoming EU Joint Action on CVD and Diabetes which would stimulate the exchange of best practices, data, and knowledge across Member States.

#### PART I - KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Mr. Benifei** called for the integration of SHDs prevention as a pillar of the European Health Union.
- **Ms. Wasbauer** underlined the concrete actions of the European Commission to tackle the burden of SHDs, especially via the JACARDI.
- **Dr. Bueno** stressed the need for a European initiative that will harmonise the healthcare systems to the needs of society.
- **Dr. Neuder** highlighted that SHD prevention must be a priority of the future French national healthcare plan.
- **Mr. Chriqui** underlined the importance of early detection of SHDs and the importance of the treatment to ensure quality of life.
- **Prof. Magni** made a concrete case calling for the development of screening programs for CVD and SHD, and via the forthcoming EU Joint Action on CVD and Diabetes.

The second part of the discussion featured a roundtable on best practices on public policies and SHD detection programmes. Participants Dr. Bueno, Prof. Alessandro Boccanelli, President of the Italian Society of Geriatric Cardiology, Jean-François Thébaut, Vice-President of the French Federation of Diabetics and Doctor John Deverteuil, General Practitioner, described in detail their experiences from the national and local initiatives to detect and treat SHDs and CVDs in general.

Dr. Bueno described the details of the newly adopted Spanish strategy in Cardiovascular Health, which **prioritises health promotion and prevention**, and is a prime example of national plan that includes early detection of Structural Heart Disease. He pointed out that there is no way of preventing SHDs and thus **when the patient comes to the hospital with clear symptoms of SHDs is already late, and therefore the new Strategy focuses on early detection through screening of all people as from 65 years**. Prof Bueno highlighted the role of methods like echocardiography and cardio-consultations.



***“Good management of SHDs costs less than the current situation” - Prof. Alessandro Boccanelli, Italian Society of Geriatric Cardiology***

Professor Boccanelli, President of the Italian Society of Geriatric Cardiology (SICGE), described a ground-breaking pilot project on SHD screening in small villages in Italy and a general population-based screening project in San Marino. In May 2022 a cardiological screening program aimed at the population over 65, was conducted in 10 small regions

geographically distributed in the Italian territory, selected by size and proximity to ten cardiological institutes. This initiative succeeded in providing education in prevention and service to the population, guaranteeing access to screening even in communities of small towns often disadvantaged by the distance from the main hospitals. In addition, on 29 September 2022, the Republic of San Marino announced the implementation of a first-of-its-kind cardiovascular health (including SHDs) screening campaign extended to the population over 50 years old. The initiative was promoted by the Secretary of State of Health and was prepared in cooperation with SICGe. Prof. Boccanelli highlighted that it is imperative to build up a system of screening in small communities, to increase the power of prevention and detection via the communication of people with each other.



***“It is primordial to have a global vision. We can prevent cardiovascular and other diseases the same way we prevent diabetes” – Dr. Jean-François Thebaut, French Federation of Diabetics***

Doctor Thebaut, Vice-President of the French Federation of Diabetics, informed the audience that there is momentum in promoting detection and prevention under the new leadership of the French Ministry of Health. He underlined the importance of having a global vision in preventing various diseases like CVDs and diabetes and **raising awareness as there is a serious concern for some French regions that have high rates of CVDs, diabetes, and low vaccination rates at the same time**.



***“We have to put emphasis on the community before the patient goes to hospital with advanced symptoms” – Dr. John de Verteuil, GP***

Doctor de Verteuil also admitted that it is vital to act at a community level to tackle the burden of SHDs. In this effort, pharmacists and care assistants can also contribute to maximizing the efficiency of early detection and at the same time, General Practitioners should get better training to detect heart murmurs. He concluded by stressing the fact that many aortic stenosis cases went undetected during the Covid-19 pandemic, as people did not visit their doctors often.



***“To achieve realistic results, we need to increase resources. The current EU4Health Program is good, but not enough” – Prof. José Luis Zamorano, Cardiologist and Professor***

Prof. Zamorano, Head of the Cardiology Service Hospital Ramon and Cajal, after describing his personal experience in building a consortium of health experts

across the EU to perform SHD screening, warned that the current EU initiatives to support national and regional consortia on detection and prevention of CVDs are not sufficiently funded. **To ensure concrete results and improve the cardiovascular health of all citizens, the EU needs to increase funding and support those initiatives in the long term.**



***“We have been very successful in addressing cancer. We must follow the same path for CVDs, including SHD” - Maria da Graça Carvalho, MEP***

Finally, MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho recognised the need for more awareness. She underlined the existing political efforts for a bigger budget for CVDs in the Horizon Europe program. In her words, the EU should follow the successful example of the EU’s Beating Cancer Plan and apply it in the area of CVDs, taking advantage of the existing momentum for more actions in this field. **She concretely asked for a plan for cardiovascular diseases that puts early detection of CVD, including Structural Heart Disease, at the forefront of the EU policy on disease prevention.**

## PART II - KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Dr. Bueno** described the Spanish Strategy on Cardiovascular Health, stressing the need to focus on primary care and including innovative detection technologies.
- **Prof. Boccaneli** by presenting the pilot SHD screening projects in Italy and San Marino, underlined the necessity to include local communities to increase the effect of SHD prevention.
- **Dr. Thebaut** called for a holistic approach to disease prevention. Several diseases can be detected at the same time.
- **Dr. De Verteuil** pointed out the need for better training of General Practitioners and to include pharmacists and nurses to detect SHDs.
- **Prof. Zamorano** highlighted the need for more long-term funding on initiatives that focus on disease prevention to achieve concrete results.
- **Ms. Carvalho** called for a European plan on CVDs, in accordance with the EU Beating Cancer Plan, to effectively tackle CVDs and SHDs in Europe.