



FOR RELEASE 12 JUNE 2007

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European Heart Health Charter Crosses Borders to Fight CVD

Brussels, June 12, 2007: Recognising that Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) kills almost half of the population of Europe and costs the EU €169 billion annually, the European Heart Health Charter was conceived by the European Society of Cardiology and the European Heart Network with the support of the European Commission and WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Launched today at the European Parliament in Brussels in the presence of EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou and Dr Nata Menabde, Deputy Regional Director of WHO Europe, the Charter is an impressive EU-wide policy document on cardiovascular disease prevention. It is signed by 14 eminent professional and public health organisations and will change the way Europe tackles CVD.

Governments, NGOs and health organisations that sign the charter commit to reduce considerably the burden of CVD in Europe (reducing the numbers of smokers, promoting healthy food choices and physical activity, reducing obesity rates and implementing best practices in cardiovascular care). They pledge to launch public information campaigns and to work towards implementing public policy that improves cardiovascular health, such as promoting exercise in schools and smoking bans. All signatories agree to strive for equity in treatment within their country and across Europe.

EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou said: "The European Commission is very pleased to have been able to play a part in bringing the Charter into being. If we are going to beat cardiovascular disease we need to redouble our efforts. We need concerted action by governments together with the health sector, with business and with NGOs and –most importantly- with citizens".

The Charter provides national governments, NGOs and health organisations with a series of tools, including HeartScore®, that will help them highlight the dangers of heart disease and create awareness amongst the general population. This can all be found on a dedicated web site (www.heartcharter.eu), which contains information about how the Charter is being implemented and aims to be a platform for exchange and successful interventions. It hosts also translations of the charter in 18 languages and examples of print and television advertisements that can be adapted for different markets.

European Heart Network Director Susanne Løgstrup said she firmly believes the Charter will improve the health of Europeans.

"It is my view, that the European Heart Health Charter will bring a new dynamic to the way in which the EU – and indeed European - health policy is developed and implemented," she said. "I am confident that with the support of the European Commission, WHO European Region and with the commitment and skill provided by the signatories, representing leading European health organisations and professional societies, in 10 years time Europe will be a healthier place with a healthier population. And that is good for everybody."

European Society of Cardiology Past President and Co-Chair of the Charter Steering Committee Lars Rydén believes the Charter's emphasis on prevention will help reduce the burden of CVD across Europe.

"Until recently the focus of attention has been on treatment. This means extending the lives of people already affected and society has ended up accumulating a mountain of people who are ill," he said. "What we have to concentrate on now is prevention, which is the goal of the Charter. We cannot continue to create a society that makes people ill, and then invest a lot of money in curing them."



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The Charter encourages participants to pay attention to gender-specific aspects of cardiovascular health and disease, and will have a specific goal of educating and supporting the younger population so they will practice heart-healthy activities throughout their lives. The Charter calls for research on the effectiveness of policy and preventive interventions, including aspects of health care expenditures as well as for epidemiological and behavioural research to determine the factors that affect the heart. Special attention will be given to the young, and towards understanding the mechanisms of ageing in the cardiovascular system.

“The Charter on CVD in Europe has the full support of both WHO and the European Commission,” said Dr. Jill Farrington, Noncommunicable Disease Coordinator of WHO Regional Office for Europe. “It provides a clear message that WHO and the European Commission are working hand in hand with cardiologists from the ESC and public organisations from EHN to form a strong, visible alliance against Europe’s greatest killer.”

It is imperative that politicians create policies that support prevention of CVD. A primary goal of the Charter is to improve our lifestyles. Better use of available treatment is also mandatory among those already afflicted by CVD.

“Changing lifestyle is not a matter of the individual alone. For people to change their lifestyle, they need supportive environments. All EU policy areas need to work in concert to create these healthier environments for all European citizens,” said Dr. Georgs Andrejevs, member of the European Parliament. “Inequalities in mortality CVD do not only occur between countries, but also within countries. Inequalities in mortality from CVD account for almost half of the excess mortality in lower socio-economic groups in most countries. Examples of inequalities can be given in the field of obesity, availability of healthy food and smoking. The Charter addresses these issues.”

“The Charter is ultimately an initiative to change European law,” said Professor John Martin, Co-Chair of the ESC Committee for European Union Relations. “If you believe that Europe has a future by giving up sovereignty to the greater good then this is one way of manifesting it – the most concrete way of doing that.”

The European Society of Cardiology (ESC)

The ESC represents nearly 53,000 cardiology professionals across Europe and the Mediterranean. Its mission is to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in Europe. The ESC achieves this through a variety of scientific and educational activities including the coordination of: clinical practice guidelines, education courses and initiatives, pan-European surveys on specific disease areas and the ESC Annual Congress, the largest medical meeting in Europe. The ESC comprises 3 Councils, 5 Associations, 19 Working Groups, 50 National Cardiac Societies and an ESC Fellowship Community (Fellow, FESC; Nurse Fellow, NFESC). For more information on ESC Initiatives, Congresses and Constituent Bodies see www.escardio.org.

The European Heart Network (EHN)

The European Heart Network (EHN) is an alliance of heart foundations and likeminded non-governmental organisations throughout Europe, with member organisations in 26 countries. EHN plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular disease through advocacy, networking and education so that it is no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe. For more information about the EHN see www.ehnheart.org

The European Commission (EC) has developed a coordinated approach to European health policy: a high level of human health protection should be assured in all Community policies.

The World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is the United Nations specialised agency for health. WHO's objective, as set out in its Constitution, is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. Health is defined in WHO's Constitution as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. 53 countries make up the WHO European Region.



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