

Safe heart plan must take on number one killer in Europe

Collaboration, information and preventative policy are needed to save millions of lives lost to cardiovascular disease in EU countries, participants heard at the first ever EACH Cardiovascular Health Summit on 10 and 11 December 2025.

“We are on the brink of a trend that could get very quickly, massively worse,” said **Olivér Várhelyi**, European Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare, speaking to approximately 200 Summit attendees in Brussels. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Europe, with 1.7 million lives lost every year.

The two-day event brought together national and EU experts just ahead of the publication of an EU Cardiovascular Health Plan expected on 16 December.

This EU “Safe Hearts Plan” will offer “a coordinated approach to cardiovascular disease at an EU level, for the first time ever,” the Commissioner explained. In particular, policy for the prevention of cardiovascular disease is “where we can make a difference.”

“Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer in Europe,” said **Damien Gruson**, President, European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine. “Most of those deaths could be prevented.”

Today millions of Europeans do not monitor their blood pressure or know their own cholesterol and blood sugar levels. **Billy Kelleher**, one of five MEPs speaking at the summit, said that “shifting to earlier diagnosis and prevention is a sensible thing to do.”

“We need health education,” said **Romana Jerkovic**, Chair of the MEP Cardiovascular Health Group. “Screening those at high risk should be the norm, not the exception.”

MEP Veronika Ostrihonova said this should include raising awareness of cardiovascular health and risks at an early age, at school. “We have to make it easier for individuals to take responsibility.”

Europe takes on the challenge

“Europe has a unique opportunity, a golden hour, in which to take the lead,” said **Thomas F. Lüscher**, President, European Society of Cardiology.

Major challenges ahead include rising obesity rates across EU countries and huge disparities in access to care, including between men and women.

Cardiovascular policy including a pan-EU Safe Hearts Plan must also avoid focusing only on heart health. To make a change, it also has to include brain health and stroke.

Environmental factors such as air pollution and even traffic noise are also too often overlooked as risk factors. Europe must reflect this in cardiovascular health policy, warned Thomas Münzel, University Medical Center of Mainz. “Protecting the environment means protecting the heart.”

All Together Now

The future of cardiovascular health in Europe will be shaped by “collaborative” efforts, participants agreed. This includes agreeing on shared EU standards, but also on collaborating with industry and with patient groups.

“Healthcare is always teamwork between professionals but it would not exist without the patient,” said **Melinda Roaldsen**, Stroke Action Plan for Europe. A “paradigm shift” is needed, away from seeing patients as passive recipients of healthcare and towards including their real life lived experience in healthcare developments.

“Industry is a healthcare collaborator, not just a contributor,” added **Doris Pommi**, Siemens Healthineers.

“If we can all work together, it will be great for the patient and for quality of life,” said **Diana Wong Ramos**, Portugal AVC, Stroke Alliance for Europe, Global Heart Hub Affiliate.

This would replace a current situation in which cardiologists and neurologists are often treated as opponents and each doctor focuses only on their own area of expertise.

“There’s a lot that can be done regarding simplification and harmonisation across Europe,” said **Francesca Colombo**, Head of the Health Division, OECD, giving a preview of an OECD report on the state of cardiovascular health in Europe, to be published 15 December.

Although the EU cannot work directly in national health care systems, the Safe Hearts Plan is an opportunity to adopt best practices at a pan-European level.

The great strength of the EACH Cardiovascular Health Summit was the diversity of voices heard, said **Cecilia Linde**, President-Elect, European Society of Cardiology, closing the event. “The future now depends on strong partnerships and collaboration, on co-creating solutions.”

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