

# CALL FOR ACTION

*Enabling Cross-Sectoral Approaches for Healthy Lifestyles in Europe*



We are a consortium of leading NGOs and sector representative bodies from the physical activity, outdoor, sport, mobility, health, patient and caregiver communities united to collaborate on active and healthy lifestyle promotion and access. In sight of combatting non-communicable diseases (NCDs), of improving quality of life and well-being and, of building healthier and more sustainable societies and economies, we hereby call on the European Union to enable and foster greater cross-sectoral approaches to healthy lifestyles across Europe.



Driven by collaboration and evidence-informed approaches, we seek to further environments conducive to healthy living and to catalyse transformative change, notably by supporting a preventive approach to health.

Integrating efforts in healthcare, education, urban planning, access to physical activity and policy development, can generate environments promoting and sustaining healthy lifestyles for all. Interdisciplinary research underscores the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors in shaping health outcomes, emphasising the importance of adopting comprehensive and cross-cutting strategies.





Together, we advocate for policy reforms, empowered communities, and champion cross-sectoral initiatives to address the root causes of NCDs, for which the potential of physical activity remains untapped. Accounting for 90% of all deaths, NCDs are the leading cause of mortality in Europe, and account for 80% of the health burden. All can fall prey to NCDs and their risk factors, burdening health budgets and economies, and individual health and well-being. The adoption of a healthy lifestyle, inclusive of regular physical activity, represents a foundational strategy for enhancing individual and public health. Addressing the complex determinants of health requires a holistic approach that transcends traditional boundaries and embraces collaboration across sectors.

A healthier future evidently requires collective action. This Call for Action intends to catalyse a paradigm shift towards healthier lifestyles by advocating for comprehensive and cross-sectoral approaches.



# CALL FOR ACTION



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**Increase EU funding, and its accessibility, and EU initiatives, that support multisectoral collaboration and coordination platforms dedicated to healthy lifestyle promotion;**
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**Conduct research into effective strategies for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour at the population level;**
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**Integrate physical activity into clinical practice through screening, counselling, and referral programmes;**
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**Implement policies to create supportive environments for physical activity, such as urban planning initiatives, transportation policies, and school-based programmes;**
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**Mobilise communities to provide accessible and safe spaces for physical activity, including parks, active mobility infrastructures, and recreational facilities (both private and public).**



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION:



## The Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases

NCDs are the leading cause of mortality in Europe where they account for 90% of all deaths and 80% of the health burden. These diseases encompass various physical and mental medical conditions, with cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, chronic respiratory ailments, and mental/neurological disorders embodying the five major NCDs. The prevalence of NCDs continues to grow, putting a significant burden on those affected, their families, European healthcare systems, economies, and society at large.

Premature mortality from NCDs results in a loss of €115 billion per year to the economy (0.8% of GDP), with further losses incurred due to lower productivity, employment rates, and disability. Beyond mortality rates and the sustainability of health systems, the burden of NCDs on life quality and well-being of those living with them, their families, and caregivers should not be underestimated.

NCDs can affect everyone: children, adults, the elderly, people of all genders, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographies. Although people from all walks of life are vulnerable to the major risk factors contributing to NCDs - including physical inactivity, unhealthy diets, tobacco and alcohol use - and are affected by environmental, cultural, and socio-economic health determinants, these NCDs are characterised by a high degree of preventability.

## Status Quo of Physical Inactivity in Europe

Regular physical activity, whether indoors, outdoors, or through active transport modes, remains one of the most effective tools for NCD prevention and management, improving overall physical and mental health, quality of life, and well-being. This importance was particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where physical activity played a significant role in strengthening and improving immune systems.



Unfortunately, current estimates reveal that one in three European adults fail to meet the physical activity guidelines outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the prevalence of physical inactivity represents a global "pandemic" that has persisted and worsened since 2001. This reality is starkly demonstrated by the Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity (2022), which highlights "alarmingly high" rates of physical inactivity in the EU, with 45% of Europeans reporting never engaging in exercise or sports.

The decline in physical activity is closely linked to sedentary behaviours observed during leisure time, work hours, and periods spent at home, as well as the preference for passive modes of transport. This trend is particularly pronounced in high-income countries, where physical inactivity rates are typically double those found in low-income nations. Various factors contribute to this pattern, including economic development, urbanisation, shifting transportation trends, cultural values, and the pervasive increase in sedentary lifestyles.

## The Potential of Increasing Physical Activity

Boosting physical activity levels to align with WHO recommendations would yield significant benefits, underscoring the pressing need for proactive interventions to mitigate this growing crisis. For example, increasing exercise levels to 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week would prevent 11.5 million new cases of NCDs by 2050, including 3.8 million cases of cardiovascular diseases, 3.5 million cases of depression, nearly 1 million cases of Type 2 diabetes, and more than 400,000 cases of cancer, according to data specific to the EU.

The argument for embracing this change is compelling, as it is grounded in a substantial body of scientific evidence derived from molecular biology, physiology, and clinical trials. This evidence elucidates the intricate biological pathways through which physical activity confers effective NCD prevention, management and care. From enhancing cardiovascular function and insulin sensitivity, to reducing chronic inflammation and oxidative stress, regular exercise plays a vital role in maintaining optimal health.

The benefits of a healthy lifestyle extend beyond physical health, offering substantial mental and emotional advantages. Regular exercise is associated with reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, improved mood, and enhanced cognitive function. Additionally, adopting a more active lifestyle could significantly reduce healthcare expenditures by preventing the onset of chronic diseases and decreasing the need for medical interventions.



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