



Priority 5:

Securing a healthy planet for healthy people

To live healthy lives, people need a healthy society on a healthy planet. In prioritising health, the EU also needs to focus on shaping, building and protecting such an environment.

Priority 5.1: Fostering prevention of non-communicable diseases

Secure the EU's capacity for resilience and robustness in an era of permacrisis. The EU faces a converging set of crises, ranging from pandemics and geopolitical conflicts to climate change and socio-economic instability. It is essential to implement a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach to create a strong healthy environment. A key component of this environment should be the promotion of health-focused research for implementation and innovation, given the cross-cutting impact of health on all areas of life. An important element should be the promotion of research and innovation in health. Furthermore, to secure people's ability to adapt and thrive in such challenging circumstances, the EU must:

- 5.1. Prioritise health over commercial interests to tackle and prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This requires creating healthy environments (including food and physical environments) and making healthy choices easy and affordable. To combat the largest and preventable burden of ill health, the EU needs similar targeted efforts across all NCDs, as those provided for the Beating Cancer Plan. Four industry sectors: alcohol, tobacco, ultra-processed food and fossil fuels account for at least a third of global deaths. In particular there is a need for statutory measures to control the marketing and availability of these unhealthy products.

NCDs represent the most significant, yet preventable, burden on public health. It is crucial for the EU to develop and endorse a comprehensive policy framework specifically designed to combat NCDs. This should go beyond merely focusing on treatment; it should emphasise a systems-thinking approach to prevention, encompassing primordial, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, particularly through the creation of health-enabling environments. A key cornerstone of this strategy should be addressing the commercial determinants of health, which are intrinsically linked to the proliferation of NCDs.

Creating healthy environments

Healthy environments are crucial for enhancing resilience and preparedness, especially in times of crisis, to support both human and planetary health and wellbeing:

- There should be greater integration between **environment and health policies**. For instance, environmental issues should be taken into account in health promotion and disease prevention policies.

- Following an Economy of Wellbeing perspective, the EU should focus on developing and implementing policies that foster the **creation of healthy environments**. This includes determining environmental and other essential aspects of prevention, including promotion of active lifestyles, enhancing green and blue spaces (i.e., bodies of water and surrounding areas), clean air, and ensuring universal access to affordable and nutritious food options across communities.
- The EU should continue its actions to drastically reduce all environmental pollution, in line with the latest scientific evidence and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Air Quality Guidelines](#).
- The issues of **sustainable mobility and infrastructure** should be tackled, especially looking at sustainable and affordable public transport, including across EU borders. Investment in urban planning and infrastructure should encourage physical activity, with the development of walkable and cyclable cities, with easy access to parks, recreational spaces, and safe walkways for exercise.
- **Smoke-free environments** should be expanded to include playgrounds, restaurant terraces, and cars carrying minors. The EU should also classify aerosols from new tobacco products and third-hand smoke as ‘environmental smoke’, enhancing protections against tobacco, smoking, and nicotine products-related harm. Concurrently, a ban on cigarette filters should be introduced due to their detrimental impact on both health and the environment.

Implementing more effective and ambitious NCD prevention policies

To address the substantial burden of NCDs on people and society, distinct actions must be taken aimed at tackling the issue from multiple perspectives.

Strengthening the European public health framework

- A comprehensive **EU NCD Strategy** that includes specific plans for all preventable NCDs should be developed, prioritising public health over commercial interests. This Strategy should encompass various domains to foster an environment conducive to healthier living for all and at all ages. As part of this strategy, dedicated plans such as an EU Cardiovascular Health Plan should be developed.
- **Systemic and regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** should be established to assess the effectiveness of NCD-related policies, including regulatory measures, taxation policies, and awareness campaigns, involving academia, policymakers, and civil society for data-driven and adaptable strategies.
- **Data quality and collection**, and analysis capabilities should be enhanced, to provide a robust evidence base for NCD policy formulation and evaluation. Cross-border data sharing within the EU and collaboration with international organisations can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of NCD trends and limits of current strategies.

Addressing the determinants of health

- Tighter regulations related to the **Commercial Determinants of Health** should be developed in sectors detrimental to health. NCD risk factors on the behavioural scale (such as alcohol, tobacco, or nutritionally poor foods) as well as on the environmental level (greenhouse gas emissions, or indoor air pollution) should in particular be mitigated. This includes, but should not be limited to, the development of measures covering aspects like marketing, availability and sales of products, especially to vulnerable and marginalised groups.

- The **Tobacco** Products Directive should be revised to include a sales ban on tobacco for those born after January 1, 2012, and address delays in updating the Tobacco Taxation Directive to harmonise taxes and discourage cross-border shopping. Concurrently, the Tobacco Advertisement Directive should be revised to ban indirect advertising and mandate plain packaging with health warnings, as well as a ban on flavoured tobacco products.
- A comprehensive European **Alcohol** Strategy should be launched, as outlined in the 2021 Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. This strategy should include restrictions on alcohol advertising to minors, introduce health warnings on labels, and mandate the listing of ingredients and nutritional information on all alcoholic beverages.
- The conflict of interest between private profit and public good should be addressed by incentivising healthier alternatives in **Food** sectors and setting health and sustainability standards for public procurement, such as food canteens. This should include regulating the marketing of nutritionally poor foods, especially those being targeted at children and adolescents, and limiting the promotion of red and processed meat.
- **Social Determinants of Health** should be considered, especially as lower socioeconomic groups are disproportionately affected. Policies should aim to make healthier choices more accessible for all by implementing subsidies for healthy food. Alongside this, taxation strategies should be implemented to discourage the consumption of harmful or ultra-processed foods.

Involving the whole of society at all levels

- As recommended by the WHO, a **systems-thinking approach** for NCD prevention that fosters cross-sectoral collaborations and includes diverse stakeholders, such as civil society, patient organisations, academics and policymakers, should be adopted.
- **Public education campaigns** should be launched to raise awareness about the health risks posed by harmful products and to promote the virtues of balanced diets, physical activity and overall healthy lifestyles. These campaigns should be designed to be inclusive, targeting not only the general population, but also younger generations, and minority and vulnerable groups to ensure equitable access to health literacy.
- The EU should take a leadership role on the global stage, collaborating with international organisations like the WHO to develop and implement effective strategies against NCD risk factors. A key element would be to use the same cross-institutional language when addressing risk factors.



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