

To: President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen

Brussels, 5 September 2024

Subject - Clean Air Day: EU Healthy Air Coalition call to strengthen EU's clean air measures to sustain the EU's quality of life and ensure greater preventative health

Dear President von der Leyen,

The EU Healthy Air Coalition (EUHAC) congratulates you on your re-election as President of the European Commission. We call on you and your College of Commissioners to use your unique power to prevent health impacts from air pollution. **By awarding clean air a prominent mandate priority at Vice-Presidency level you will be able to save costs and protect those most vulnerable** – pregnant women, children, the elderly, those with pre-existing health conditions or facing socio-economic health inequities.

EUHAC brings together non-profit health expert voices in the EU representing diverse constituencies of the health sector, including doctors and other health care professionals, scientists, public health experts and groups, respiratory or cancer patients and health insurance funds. We stand for urgently needed science-based policy change in the EU that prioritises prevention: prevention of lives lost, new cases of disease, health care costs, prevention of increasing socio-economic inequalities.

Science is clear: air pollution remains the **top environmental risk to health in Europe**, resulting in hundreds of thousands of premature deaths and hundreds of billions of euros of costs annually. Everyone is vulnerable to harm caused by air pollution and our level of vulnerability is outside of individual control, as it evolves with age, health condition, socio-economic status, as well as where we live, study, or work.

There is a large body of evidence showing that air pollution is a cause for all major non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, stroke, diabetes, dementia, and lung cancer, as well as acute respiratory infections, with growing evidence on adverse impacts on mental and neurological health. Despite the huge disease burden caused by air pollution, most of the health and economic impacts of air pollution are **preventable**. Moreover, measures to improve air quality can be a win-win both for health and climate mitigation and adaptation.

We take note of the priorities outlined in your Political Guidelines including a commitment to step up preventative health and rising to the challenge of mental health. Strengthening clean air efforts during your mandate 2024-29 would ensure that the EU leads the way at global level in tackling air pollution for better health, quality of life and disease prevention. This includes **urgent measures** across the range of the EU's clean air policy framework:

- Swift implementation and enforcement of the revised EU Ambient Air Quality Directive (AAQD), as well as strengthened efforts to tackle air pollution at the source;
- Properly addressing the slow pace and narrow scope of mandatory decrease of pollutant emissions at national level, both in the framework of the [evaluation](#) of Directive (EU) 2016/2284 on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants (NECD) and through the [revision](#) of the Gothenburg Protocol on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.

We thank you in advance for considering our call and would be happy to meet with your relevant team members to provide further information.

Sincerely,

Anne Stauffer, Deputy Director

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

On behalf of the EU Healthy Air Coalition (EUHAC) founding members

Dr Christiaan Keijzer, President - Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)

Dr Wendy Yared, Director - Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

Christine Strous, Board Member - European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA)

Dimitris Kontopidis, Chair - European Lung Foundation (ELF)

Dr. Milka Sokolović, Director General - European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

Prof. Barbara Hoffmann, Advocacy Council Chair - European Respiratory Society (ERS)

Xavier Brenez, Chief Executive Officer - Independent Health Insurance Funds (Mutualités Libres)