



International
Diabetes Federation
Europe



PRESS STATEMENT

World Health Day: European health organisations speak out on Universal Health Coverage

“An urgent call for EU action to deliver the right to health: address increasing health inequalities and barriers to healthcare in Europe today”

Brussels, 7 April 2019 – World Health Day’s theme this year is **Universal Health Coverage**. The European Patients’ Forum, and our members, representing the interests of over 150 million patients in Europe strongly back the WHO’s call on world leaders and policy makers to ensure that all groups can access the care they need, and when they need it. This message is all the more important in the current challenging political environment, in which European citizens will vote to elect a new European Parliament, with the possibility of less meaningful EU action on health post-2020.

Affordable and timely access to high quality healthcare is a fundamental human right. While Universal Health Coverage is a well-recognised goal for all healthcare systems in the EU, this basic right is not yet a reality for all patients in the EU. On the contrary, evidence shows disparities in access to healthcare in Europe are increasing, with many patients [falling through the cracks](#) and being left behind with no or insufficient health coverage. This year’s World Health Day highlights Universal Health Coverage - a key target of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. With the European Elections around the corner, we renew our heartfelt call for equitable person-centred high-quality health and social care to be made accessible in a timely way, to every patient who needs it, regardless of gender, age, disability, employment, residence status or geographical location.

A snapshot of the EPF community views

The European Patients’ Forum (EPF) has been working hard towards the implementation of the political steps and actions set out in our [Roadmap to achieving Universal Health Coverage for all patients by 2030](#): “We are [calling on](#) all EU leaders and MEP candidates to bring issues that matter to patients at the heart of the next mandate. It is crucial to raise awareness of the unmet needs, unacceptable gaps and barriers patients face in accessing healthcare”, says **Nicola Bedlington**, Secretary General of the European Patients’ Forum (EPF).

With universal mental health coverage still remaining a distant reality for millions of people in Europe and around the world, “*achieving universal mental health care is a key societal and public health issue: people experiencing mental ill health still face constant barriers and discrimination within the healthcare system. This not only is against the rights of people with mental health problems, but it also has important repercussions on people’s physical health and in the end on society at large*”, says **Claudia Marinetti**, Director of [Mental Health Europe](#) (MHE).

Although our community is seeing developments of novel and innovative therapies for the treatment of haemophilia and other rare bleeding disorders, much work remains to be done in this field. “*If we*

don't act, the promise of life-altering innovative therapies on the horizon will come hand-in-hand with restrictions on patient access of a scale larger than we've seen in the past. As such, patient organisations need to be given the formal and official ability to co-shape, co-create and co-implement the solutions they need, and to do so as equal partners. Patient organisations are part of civil society, both playing a necessary and vital 'third pillar' role next to business and industry. Let's get to work on all levels - together - to achieve real-world outcomes across the globe", says **Amanda Bok**, Chief Executive Officer of the [European Haemophilia Consortium](#) (EHC).

"Institutions should commit to build digital programmes and strategies to improve patients' lives through the development of data driven systems and apps that will ease self-management- we are not yet there", says **Prof Dr Sehnaz Karadeniz**, Chair of the [International Diabetes Federation](#) (IDF Europe). Given the complexity of diabetes finding the right balance between nutrition, medicine and physical exercise is a challenge.

Multiple Sclerosis is one disease among many others that are an economic burden for society. Better access to healthcare will definitely help reduce that burden. *"Huge disparities exist across Europe proving the right to health for all is still a myth for many. To influence positive change on the political agenda impacting the quality of life of people living with MS and other chronic diseases, there is a need to educate and empower people through evidence-based awareness raising",* says **Elisabeth Kasilingam**, Managing Director of the [European Multiple Sclerosis Platform](#) (EMSP).

With adequate care, support and protection of their rights, children and adults with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus can live fulfilling lives. *"For people with lifelong disabilities such as spina bifida and hydrocephalus, Universal Health Coverage - including access to quality and affordable assistive and medical products and devices - is key to reduce the risk of secondary health issues and premature death, to ensure inclusion in society, and to prevent families from falling into poverty",* says **Lieven Bauwens**, Secretary-General of the [International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus](#) (IF).

"Great disparities in healthcare between and within Member States including the high reliance on out-of-pocket payments are still some of the major concerns for patients across Europe. Special focus is needed based on the particular circumstances of the regions as well as the inclusion and support to vulnerable groups and those who are most in need", says **Stanimir Hasardzhiev**, Secretary General of the [Patient Access Partnership](#) (PACT) and Chairperson of the [National Patients Organization Bulgaria](#) (NPO).

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