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[European Society of Cardiology](#)

The human and economic cost of heart disease in Europe

MEP Heart Group meets in Brussels today

New figures published by the European Society of Cardiology¹ and the European Heart Network² this month, highlighted the significant differences in cardiovascular disease across Europe. One fact, nevertheless, remains the same: cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the main cause of death in the European Union, killing over 2 million people per year. CVD costs the EU economy over 192 billion Euros annually. Many of these deaths could be averted with proper prevention policies.

These new statistics will be the main focus of the meeting of the Members of the European Parliament Heart Group which will take place in Brussels today, 26 February 2008.

These latest figures show that cardiovascular disease is a critical health problem for Europe and must be taken seriously. High risk countries should take urgent steps to implement measures to reduce the burden of CVD. The elevated mortality rates in some European countries are also unacceptable from both a human and economical point of view, declared Dr Andrejevs co-chair of the MEP Heart Group.

Aware of this critical health problem, members of the European Parliament voted with an overwhelming majority a Resolution on action to tackle cardiovascular disease on 12 July 2007. Last October, the MEP Heart Group was officially created. The group works together with the European Heart Network³ and the European Society of Cardiology⁴ to gather and exchange information on cardiovascular health and to stimulate initiatives across Europe on cardiovascular disease prevention.

EHN statistics show that CVD costs European economy 192 billion Euros a year, which results in a per capita cost of 391 Euros. 57% of this is directly linked to health care, 21% to productivity losses and 22 % to the cost of informal care provided by relatives and friends.

Premature death and suffering from CVD is largely avoidable, declared Ms Susanne Logstrup from the European Heart Network. These recent studies show how many western European countries have managed to reduce mortality linked to CVD. It is the duty of the EU to extend these successful policies to all Member States. As Dr William Wijns, chair of the ESC Committee for European Relations underlines: So those who think prevention is expensive, I say ... try disease!

Researchers found that mortality rates due to CVD were high in some Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Portugal and regions in southern Spain and Italy. They also found that many countries had changed from being high to low risk and that current classifications did not take into account the considerable regional variations. These disparities are associated with differences in diet, alcohol consumption, smoking, physical activity, the quality of medical care and environmental factors. Western European countries show a trend towards lower mortality rates linked to CVD. Finland appears to be an example of how public health interventions can make a big difference to reduce death caused by heart disease.

Several projects are already underway aiming to provide Member States with adequate tools to help reduce the burden of CVD. These include the European Heart Health Charter⁵; the EuroHeart Project⁶ and the revised European Guidelines on CVD prevention in clinical practice⁷. The challenge for Member States today is to implement all these recommendations taking into account local economic and cultural realities. Statistics have confirmed the alarming cost of not doing so.

As a cardiologist, says Dr William Wijns of the European Society of Cardiology, I am confronted every day with the terrible consequences of heart disease. People who normally wouldn't consider themselves as risk takers, nevertheless take daily risks by smoking or eating unhealthily. As specialists we get to see people as patients, when the damage is done. To see Members of the European Parliament actually focus on Cardiovascular health is extremely important for the ESC as they can help Europe take further action, in particular in the field of prevention, by educating populations and by providing supportive environments helping people to choose a healthy lifestyle.

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1 European Heart Journal, flagship journal of the European Society of Cardiology. For full report go to:

http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/eurheartj/press_releases/freepdf/ehm604.pdf

2 European Heart Network (2008) European cardiovascular disease statistics 2008. Brussels. European Heart Network. For the full report go to: <http://www.ehnheart.org> (statistics)

3The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels based alliance of 31 heart foundations and likeminded nongovernmental organisations throughout Europe, with member organisations in 26 countries, see www.ehnheart.org

4The European Society of Cardiology (ESC) represents more than 50,000 cardiology professionals across Europe and the Mediterranean. The ESC comprises 4 Councils for Cardiology Practice, 5 Associations, 19 Working Groups and 50 National Cardiac Societies Its mission is to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in Europe, see www.escardio.org

5 www.heartcharter.eu

6 <http://www.escardio.org/initiatives/EuroHeart/> or
<http://www.ehnheart.org/content/itemstory.asp?level0=1456&level1=2096&level2=2097>

7 http://www.escardio.org/knowledge/guidelines/Guidelines_list.htm?hit=pna
