

European Commission's call for evidence on an EU Cardiovascular Health Plan

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IQWiG agrees that an EU initiative is necessary to improve cardiovascular health, given that cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death and a major contributor to disability across all Member States. We would like to emphasize two specific issues:

Firstly, the main aim should be to strengthen primary (including primordial) prevention, with a particular focus on the social determinants of population health. This requires a "health-in-all-policies approach", as recommended by the WHO [1]. At the population level, primary prevention can generally lead to greater and more equitable health improvements than individual-level measures, such as risk factor screening. The EU should therefore take the lead in coordinating Member States' actions to promote healthy foods, curb the consumption of unhealthy foods, increase physical activity, and control pollution. United action is necessary to foster both political action and individual acceptance of primary structural prevention measures, such as higher taxes on sugar and alcohol.

Secondly, any action must be subject to rigorous scientific monitoring and evaluation. Admittedly, evaluating preventive measures is challenging, especially when they need to be implemented at a national or regional level. The EU should therefore support its Member States in carrying out innovative research activities, such as cluster-randomized intervention trials or natural experiments [2]. Similarly, the EU should take the lead in establishing the organizational, legal, and scientific foundations for using routinely collected health data or registries for research purposes. This includes, but is not limited to, the European Health Data Space. Generally, the less hazardous an intervention is, the less rigorous its evaluation needs to be. Therefore, observational data may provide sufficient scientific evidence on certain preventive health measures. However, more robust evidence is required for higher-risk interventions, such as screening for hypercholesterolaemia, which involves drug therapy.

References:

1. WHO. Health in all policies: Helsinki declaration. Framework for country action. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2014. [<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241506908>]
2. Craig P, Campbell M, Deidda M, et al. Using natural experiments to evaluate population health interventions: a framework for producers and users of evidence. Public Health Res (Southampt). 2025; 13: 1-59. <https://doi.org/10.3310/jtyw6582>