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**Brussels**

## **European health voices unite to demand healthier food policies as Commission launches European Board on Agriculture and Food**

Health groups representing millions of patients, doctors and nutritionists across the continent have written [an open letter](#) to EU leaders, including Commissioners Hansen, Hoekstra, and Várhelyi, calling on them to prioritise preventative policies to promote healthy and sustainable diets when formulating a food and agriculture vision for the bloc.

The groups, which include the [European Public Health Alliance](#) (EPHA), the [European Stroke Organisation](#) (ESO) and [Caring Doctors](#) in the Netherlands, also expressed consternation at the lack of health representation in policy discussions around the future of food and agriculture in Europe so far.

They pointed in particular to their exclusion from the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture in the EU last summer. With the opening of applications for the European Board on Agriculture and Food at the end of last week, health groups are pressing the Commission to prove its commitment to an inclusive dialogue by accepting their participation this time.

Dr Milka Sokolović, Director General of EPHA, said that health groups are extending their hand to bring their necessary scientific expertise into the policy debate and to ensure a focus on essential policies and incentives to steer the food market towards healthier, more sustainable products for consumers.

She said: “From a public health perspective, our food system is a ticking time bomb - in addition to the enormous issue of unhealthy diets severely impacting people’s health, it remains the case that more than 60% of antibiotics are used in animal farming. We’re not only accelerating antimicrobial resistance, but also creating the perfect conditions for future pandemic.

“It would be short-sighted not to include health groups in the conversation about food and the risk of failing to prioritise prevention-focused policies threatens to deepen our existing health crisis. We need systemic change now.”

The letter calls for EU institutions to focus on improving food environments through policy, instead of leaving patients, consumers, healthcare professionals and budgets to bear the burden of diet-related diseases.

Around €700 billion EU healthcare budget is spent on treating non-communicable diseases each year, the vast majority of which are influenced by unhealthy diets. Strategic preventive

measures in the food market, such as a policy on ready-made meals, could be a better investment and a win-win-win for people, pockets and the planet.

Prof. Simona Sacco, President of the ESO commented: "The evidence linking diets to stroke and cardiovascular risks is overwhelming. The food system is a major contributor to the disease burden in the EU and a huge drain on national health budgets. There is no doubt that a diet shift must be part of European food and agricultural policy. Better emphasis on stroke prevention would save lives and money"

Dr. Patrick Deckers, chairman of Caring Doctors added: "In the Netherlands, we're starting to witness the power of medical professionals and organisations uniting for preventive health and better food policies. Our strong support of this EU-wide initiative was the logical next step - we have the chance to reshape our food system into a healthy and sustainable one. But the voice of the health sector needs to be heard."

## **Ends**

### **Notes to editors**

The full list of signatories on the letter are:

Academia Española de Nutrición y Dietética (AEND)  
Alliance Santé Planétaire  
Caring Doctors  
Collectif National des Associations d'Obèses (CNAO)  
Deutsche Allianz Klimawandel und Gesundheit (KLUG)  
European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA)  
European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)  
European Stroke Organisation (ESO)  
Fédération Française des Diabétiques  
Fédération Promotion Santé  
Federazione Nutrizionisti Professionisti  
France Assos Santé  
German Association of Dietitians (VDD)  
Läkare för framtiden  
Physicians Association for Nutrition (PAN)  
Polish Society of Lifestyle Medicine (PSLM)  
Sociedad Española de Salud Pública (SESPAS)  
Société Française de Santé Publique (SFSP)