

European Commission
European Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth Wopke Hoekstra
Rue de la loi 200, B-1049, Brussels, Belgium

Brussels, September 8th, 2025

Dear Commissioner Hoekstra,

We, the undersigned health and medical professionals from across Europe, write to you with deep concern about the ongoing threat that air pollution (from internal combustion engines) poses to human health and the urgent need for decisive action to protect the health of communities across Europe.

As clinicians, public health experts, and public health professionals, we witness firsthand the burden that polluted air places on our patients and healthcare systems. We urge you, in your role as European Commissioner for Climate Action, to place the protection of air quality and the acceleration of clean transport at the heart of EU policy while not backing down from your commitment to phase out internal combustion engines by 2035.

Every year, air pollution is responsible for over 300,000 premature deaths in Europe. It contributes to heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, asthma, dementia, pregnancy complications, and impaired development in children. Crucially, the youngest and oldest members of our communities—children and older adults—are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of polluted air. Children's developing lungs and brains are particularly sensitive, and exposure can lead to lifelong health problems. Older adults often suffer from chronic illnesses that are worsened by poor air quality, leading to increased hospitalizations and premature mortality.

Cleaner air means fewer hospital admissions, healthier children, and longer, more active lives for all Europeans. It also means a more resilient healthcare system and a more just society. The science is clear, and the tools are available. What is needed now is the political will to act.

The combustion of fossil fuels in road transport is one of the leading sources of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), which have no known safe exposure levels yet are known for their significant impact on human health, including, when combined, higher mortality from respiratory diseases. In densely populated urban areas, where combustion engines are more present, the situation is even more dire, with (vehicle) emissions contributing to chronic respiratory and cardiovascular illness, lost productivity, and reduced quality of life. In Europe for instance, 7% of cardiovascular deaths are attributable to air pollution, including from vehicle emissions making them a significant and preventable contributor to cardiovascular disease.

For these reasons, **we strongly support the European Union's commitment to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2035.** This target is not only vital for reducing greenhouse gas emissions—it is essential for reducing toxic air pollutants and

safeguarding public health. Delaying or weakening this goal would put lives at risk, prolong Europe's dependency on fossil fuels, and undermine our collective right to clean air.

To make it possible while respecting equity, all the necessary steps should be considered before that date, to transform the existing production with the least negative effects on employment and with reasonable support to share this change within the whole European population.

Signatories:

Dr Prashant Kumar, Co-Director, Institute for Sustainability, Professor and Chair in Air Quality and Health, winner of the Haagen-Smit Clean Air Award

Mihaela Lovše, President Slovenian Coalition for Public Health, Environment and Tobacco Control

Arianna Gamba, Director of Programmes, Health Care Without Harm Europe

Ulrike Gehring, Environment and Health Committee Chair, European Respiratory Society (ERS)

Stefania Manetti, President, Culturale Association of Paediatricians -Italy

Laura Reali, President, European Confederation of Primary Care Paediatricians (ECPCP)

Lawson Rob, President, European Lifestyle Medicine Council

Carla Ancona, Senior Environmental epidemiologist, Epidemiology Department, Lazio Regional Health Authority

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