



Joint Response of EuropeActive and its National Associations to the EU Cardiovascular Health Plan Call for Evidence

September 2025

EuropeActive, together with its undersigned National Association Members, welcomes the European Commission's initiative to establish an EU Cardiovascular Health Plan to improve public health, strengthen health systems, and enhance the quality of life of EU citizens. We particularly applaud the strong emphasis on prevention, as addressing risk factors and the early onset of chronic diseases is by far the most robust, efficient, and cost-effective approach - improving quality of life for citizens while significantly reducing the immense economic and societal burden linked to treatments and hospitalisations.

Cardiovascular diseases remain the leading cause of death in Europe, affecting 60 million people and further generating five million new diagnoses annually. Beyond the personal suffering they cause, CVDs represent a major economic challenge, accounting for billions in healthcare costs, productivity losses, and informal care. Europe is also entering a demographic crisis, with an ageing and shrinking population that risks placing additional strain on healthcare systems and labour markets. Addressing this challenge requires coordinated action across sectors, and **physical activity must be placed at the core of prevention and management strategies as a fundamental pillar of cardiovascular health.**

Physical activity is one of the most powerful, evidence-based, and cost-efficient tools available to prevent and manage cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are often interlinked and present as co-morbidities or multi-morbidities. Research consistently shows that regular exercise lowers blood pressure, improves vascular function, maintains healthy weight, prevents and manages Type 2 diabetes, reduces the risk of site-specific cancers, and mitigates multi-morbidities. It further delivers substantial mental health benefits, reducing depression and anxiety, improving mood, and enhancing cognitive function. **The greatest cardiovascular benefits resulting from exercise arise from improved cardiorespiratory fitness (CRF), expressed as maximum oxygen consumption (VO₂ max), which is recognised as a stronger prognosis predictor than physical activity levels alone.** Adults who meet World Health Organisation (WHO) activity guidelines enjoy a **20–30% lower risk of premature death**. **If every European achieved at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, the EU could prevent 11.5 million new NCD cases by 2050 - including 3.8 million CVD cases -** significantly reducing healthcare costs while boosting productivity and quality of life. Enabling and encouraging individuals to remain physically active throughout their lifespan not only reduces the risk of chronic disease but supports longer workforce participation. This is particularly relevant as **a significant number of older workers on sick leave do not manage to reintegrate into the labour market**, often transitioning directly from long-term health-related absence into early retirement. Importantly, WHO classifies **physical activity promotion among its global “Best Buys,”** highlighting it as one of the most cost-effective interventions to reduce NCDs.

Despite this compelling evidence, physical activity is still under-prioritised in health policy. **One in three Europeans fails to meet WHO recommendations, while 45% report never exercising or playing sports at all.** **A study reported** that **only 5.8% of European adults live a healthy lifestyle.** Physical inactivity has reached “pandemic” proportions and is worsening, driven by sedentary behaviours at work, home, and in transport. Unless this trend is reversed, the EU will struggle to reduce the growing burden of CVDs and to meet its broader health and resilience objectives, including Sustainable Development Goal 3.4 - *by 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.* Promoting physical activity also has a strong equity dimension: community-based and affordable initiatives are proven to reduce health inequalities and deliver benefits across socio-economic groups, ensuring no one is left behind.

Amidst the alarming decline in physical activity levels, and the urgent need to strengthen prevention and management of CVDs and other NCDs - a need made abundantly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic - physical activity still receives insufficient attention from policymakers within the healthcare space. Therefore, EuropeActive and its National Association Members urge the European Commission to elevate physical activity as a central component of the forthcoming *EU Cardiovascular Health Plan*. We call for the Plan to include the following concrete actions:

- **Prioritise physical activity politically and financially:** Recognise physical activity as one of the most cost-effective yet underutilised public health interventions, and allocate dedicated funding and political support to implement it across Europe.
- **Integrate physical activity into healthcare and clinical practice:** Establish systematic screenings for physical inactivity, [assess fitness levels through validated measures such as VO₂ max](#) (maximal oxygen uptake, recognised as a clinical “vital sign” of cardiorespiratory fitness), provide tailored counselling, and develop referral pathways to adapted fitness and physical activity programmes, including for people living with, or at risk of, cardiovascular diseases.
- **Foster cross-sector collaboration and increase support:** Strengthen coordination between health, physical activity and fitness, transport, education, and urban planning sectors, and expand EU funding for cross-sectoral programmes, digital platforms, and initiatives that promote physical activity, creating environments that make active lifestyles more accessible and achievable across all regions.
- **Invest in research and evidence-based solutions:** Fund research to identify the most effective strategies for increasing physical activity, reducing sedentary behaviour, and scaling successful interventions across Europe.
- **Support inclusive, community-based initiatives:** Promote initiatives that encourage active lifestyles while reducing health inequalities, ensuring that benefits reach all socio-economic groups, including vulnerable populations.

As the *EU Cardiovascular Health Plan* will also guide national strategies, EuropeActive, together with its National Association Members, stands ready to contribute expertise and align efforts across Europe. The fitness and physical activity sector can deliver scalable, inclusive, and evidence-based solutions with measurable health impact, and we look forward to participating in future consultations and providing evidence and expertise to support the successful implementation of the plan.



About EuropeActive

EuropeActive is the leading non-profit, membership-based organisation representing the European fitness and physical activity sector. Our members include 30 national associations, fitness and health club operators, suppliers, and fit-tech / well-tech companies. Collectively, our sector serves over 70 million club users, generates €36 billion in annual revenue, and comprises 64,550 facilities. Our mission is to help get "more people, more active, more often." We strive to enable access to physical activity, and to further promote exercise as a preventative and cost-effective public health solution to combat non-communicable diseases, to improve quality of life and overall well-being, and to build sustainable, resilient communities across the continent.

For further information, please visit www.europeactive.eu