

h4EU

Healthy
Lifestyles
for Europe



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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Enabling Cross-Sectoral Approaches
for Healthy Lifestyles in Europe



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 "Healthy Lifestyles for Europe project (HL4EU)"





Policy Recommendations Enabling Cross-Sectoral Approaches for Healthy Lifestyles in Europe

The Healthy Lifestyles for Europe (HL4EU) Policy Recommendations aim to support stronger cross-sectoral approaches to healthy lifestyles through physical activity. Building on the HL4EU Call for Action, they respond to the need to better address the root causes of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), improve quality of life, and support more sustainable and resilient societies.

Health outcomes are shaped by interconnected social, economic and environmental factors. Promoting healthy lifestyles therefore requires a preventive and coordinated approach across sectors such as health, sport and physical activity, mobility, education, environment, and community development. Strengthening collaboration across these areas is essential to creating environments that make healthy choices accessible to all.

These recommendations are based on evidence generated throughout the HL4EU project, including desk research, analysis of good practices across Europe, and stakeholder input through Virtual Focus Groups.

To provide a clear and structured framework, the findings have been organised into a set of key policy areas, which represent the main domains where action is needed to strengthen cross-sectoral approaches to healthy lifestyles. These policy areas are translated into concrete policy recommendations, outlining specific actions for decision-makers at EU, national, and local levels. Building on this, the recommendations are further grouped into thematic sections, which offer a more detailed and coherent narrative around each area of action, including rationale and possible directions for implementation.

Key Policy Areas



Strengthening cross-sector governance and coordination



Ensuring sustainable and collaborative funding models



Integrating physical activity within health and prevention systems



Promoting equity and a life-course approach to healthy lifestyles



Strengthening evidence, impact frameworks, and whole-of-society engagement

Policy Recommendations

A.

Strengthen cross-sector governance and coordination:
Establish formal coordination mechanisms across policy sectors and governance levels to ensure aligned policy design and effective implementation.

B.

Integrate physical activity within health and prevention systems:
Embed physical activity within national health strategies, prevention programmes, and healthcare pathways, while strengthening links with community-based initiatives.

C.

Promote equity and a life-course approach to healthy lifestyles:
Ensure policies address all stages of life and reduce barriers linked to socioeconomic, environmental, and accessibility factors.

D.

Strengthen evidence systems and the policy framing of prevention:
Improve monitoring and evaluation frameworks to capture the broader impacts of healthy lifestyle initiatives, while positioning prevention as a long-term social and economic investment.

F.

Expand cross-sector and community engagement:
Engage a wider range of sectors, including mobility, urban planning, environment, and education, while strengthening the role of communities and civil society in the design and implementation of policies.

Promoting healthy lifestyles requires coordinated action across governance, funding, health systems, and community engagement. These areas are interdependent: effective governance enables better funding alignment; sustainable funding supports long-term implementation; and stronger community and cross-sector engagement ensures that policies are inclusive, locally relevant, and impactful. Addressing these dimensions together is essential to achieving systemic and lasting change.

Achieving healthier lifestyles for all requires coordinated, cross-sectoral action at EU, national, and local levels, supported by sustained investment, inclusive approaches, and strong collaboration across society.



Policy Objective

Strengthen coordination across policy sectors and governance levels, and improve alignment between policy design and implementation, to support integrated and sustainable approaches to promoting healthy lifestyles through physical activity.

Cross-sector collaboration already exists in many projects and initiatives across Europe. However, evidence from the HL4EU good practice analysis and the Virtual Focus Groups indicates that such collaboration often remains informal and project-based. Strengthening governance structures can help embed cross-sector cooperation within more durable policy frameworks.

This theme focuses specifically on institutional coordination and governance structures, rather than funding instruments or sectoral participation.

Rationale

The analysis indicates that many successful initiatives operate through cross-sector collaboration. However, responsibilities often remain fragmented across ministries and governance levels. Establishing formal coordination mechanisms can support more coherent policy design and facilitate long-term implementation.

Possible directions for action



Establish cross-ministerial coordination platforms or working groups dedicated to healthy lifestyle promotion.



Adopt integrated national strategies linking physical activity, health promotion, mobility, education, and community development.



Strengthen coordination mechanisms that connect national, regional, and local governance levels.



Ensure clear ownership and accountability by designating a lead coordinating entity or responsible actor for cross-sector initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION A1

Establish formal cross-sector coordination mechanisms

Call on the European Commission and Member States to establish or strengthen formal cross-sector coordination mechanisms, in line with a Health in All Policies approach, ensuring alignment between policy design and implementation across sectors such as health, sport and physical activity, mobility, education, environment, and community development.

RECOMMENDATION A2

Strengthen governance incentives and implementation alignment for cross-sector collaboration

Call on the European Commission and Member States to strengthen governance frameworks that incentivise collaboration between sectors and institutions working on healthy lifestyle promotion, including through the European Semester, national reform programmes, and other relevant EU initiatives.

Rationale

Findings suggest that cross-sector collaboration often depends on personal networks or temporary project partnerships rather than structural incentives. Introducing governance mechanisms that reward collaboration can support more stable and institutionalised forms of cross-sector engagement.

Possible directions for action



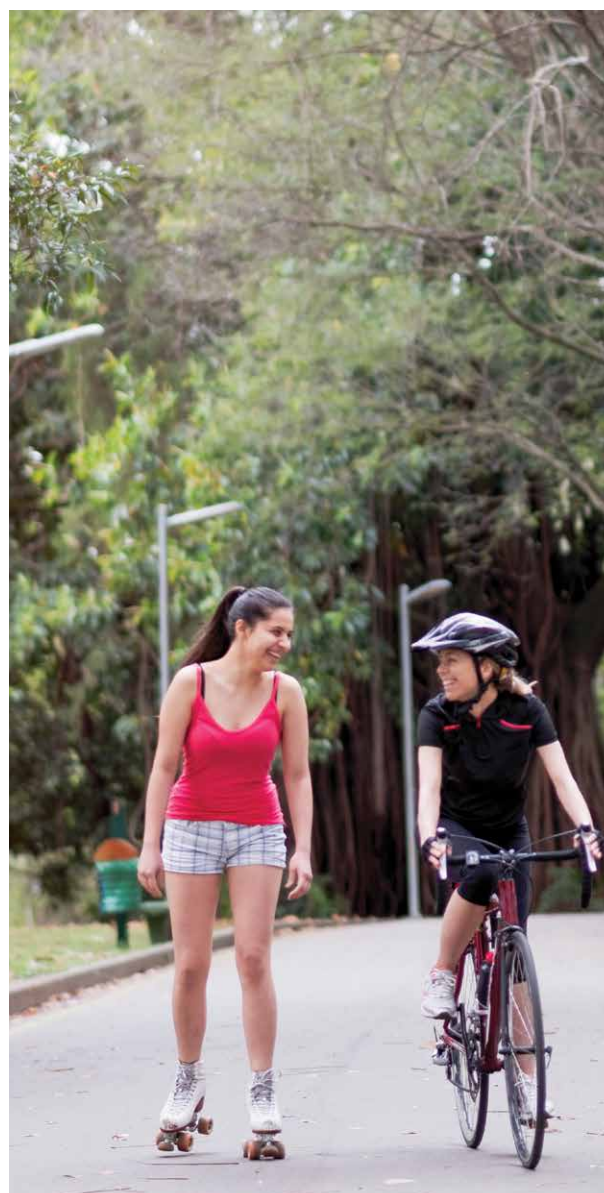
Define coordinated responsibilities across ministries, supported by clearly designated lead actors, to ensure effective implementation of preventive health and healthy lifestyle policies.



Develop governance models that link policy objectives with implementation structures at regional and local levels.



Ensure alignment between policy objectives and implementation mechanisms, including funding, delivery structures, and local-level capacity.



Policy Objective

Promote funding frameworks that support long-term, cross-sector collaboration for healthy lifestyle promotion, moving beyond short-term project cycles towards more sustainable investment in prevention.

While many successful initiatives promoting healthy lifestyles operate through innovative partnerships and community engagement, the evidence gathered through the project suggests that such initiatives often depend on fragmented and short-term funding. Strengthening funding models that encourage collaboration and longer-term investment can help ensure the sustainability and scalability of effective approaches.

This theme focuses on financial mechanisms that enable cross-sector collaboration and long-term implementation.

RECOMMENDATION B1

Encourage funding frameworks that support cross-sector collaboration

Call on the European Commission and Member States to better align and, where appropriate, adapt EU and national funding instruments (including EU4Health Programme, Erasmus+, and Cohesion Policy funds) to incentivise and enable cross-sector collaboration in the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Rationale

Stakeholders highlighted fragmented funding streams and limited incentives for collaboration as key barriers. Many initiatives rely on short-term, project-based funding, limiting sustainability and scalability. Greater alignment and strategic use of EU and national funding frameworks can support integrated, cross-sector, and long-term approaches.

Possible directions for action



Introduce funding criteria that reward cross-sector collaboration within EU and national programmes addressing health promotion and physical activity.



Define coordinated responsibilities across ministries, supported by clearly designated lead actors to ensure effective implementation.



Establish joint funding initiatives involving multiple policy sectors or ministries.



Develop funding frameworks that recognise the multi-sector nature of healthy lifestyle promotion.

Rationale

A mismatch between short political and funding cycles and the long-term nature of preventive health outcomes has been highlighted in the findings. Many initiatives require sustained engagement to generate lasting impact. More stable funding structures can support the transition from short-term projects to scalable programmes.

RECOMMENDATION B2

Support longer-term investment in prevention and healthy lifestyles

Call on the European Commission and Member States to prioritise funding models that provide greater stability for preventive health initiatives, within the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034 and corresponding national budgetary frameworks, recognising that sustainable behaviour change and cross-sector collaboration require long-term investment.

Possible directions for action



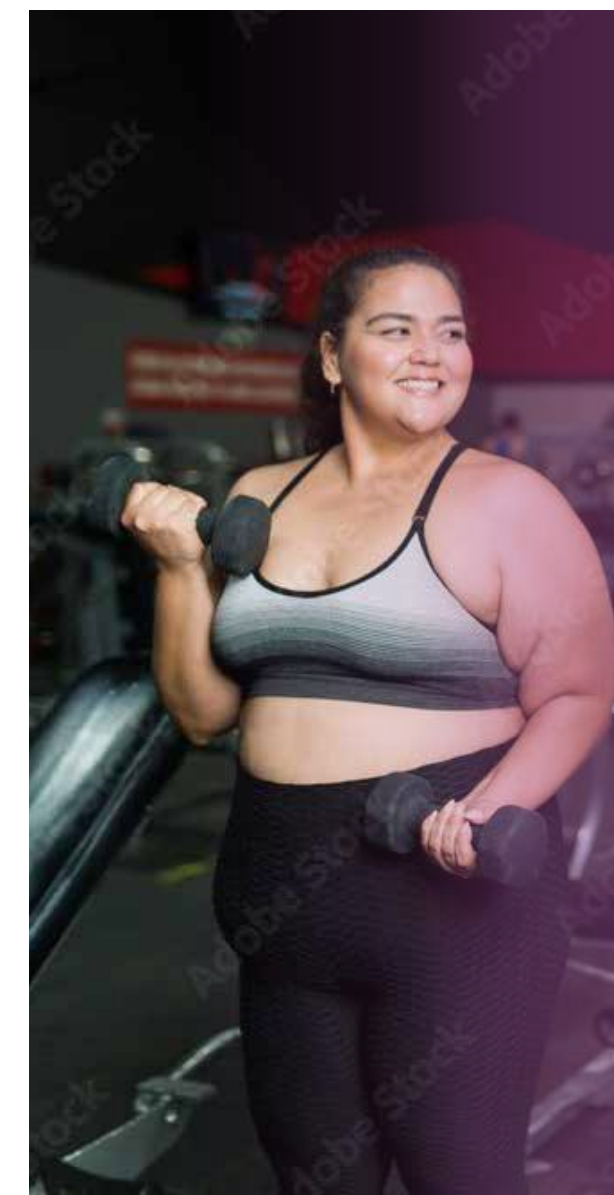
Introduce multi-annual funding frameworks for preventive health and physical activity initiatives.



Align policy strategies for healthy lifestyles with stable funding streams at national and regional levels.



Develop funding mechanisms that support scaling up successful initiatives and transferring good practices across regions.





Integration of Physical Activity within Health and Prevention Systems

Theme C

Policy Objective

Strengthen the integration of physical activity within health systems and preventive health strategies, recognising its role as a core component of long-term health promotion and disease prevention.

Physical activity is widely recognised as a key determinant of health and wellbeing. However, the HL4EU evidence base suggests that its integration within health systems and preventive health policies remains uneven across countries and regions. Strengthening the connection between health systems and healthy lifestyle promotion and access can help ensure that physical activity is systematically embedded within prevention frameworks.

This theme focuses on the integration of physical activity within health systems and prevention frameworks.

Possible directions for action



Integrate physical activity into national prevention strategies and health policies.



Embed physical activity within clinical guidelines and healthcare pathways.



Strengthen collaboration between healthcare systems and community-based initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION C1

Integrate physical activity within national prevention and health strategies

Call on Member States to systematically integrate physical activity into national and regional health strategies, prevention programmes, and public health policies, in alignment with WHO guidelines and relevant EU frameworks, including the upcoming revision of Council Recommendation on health-enhancing physical activity and through instruments such as National Reform Programmes under the European Semester.

Rationale

The analysis confirms a strong relationship between physical activity and health sectors, yet integration within health systems remains uneven. Strengthening this integration can support more coherent and effective prevention approaches.

RECOMMENDATION C2

Strengthen links between health-care systems and community-based physical activity initiatives

Call on Member States, with support from the European Commission, to develop and scale structured referral and cooperation mechanisms between healthcare providers and community-based physical activity and health promotion initiatives, including through policy support, capacity-building measures, and the strategic use of EU programmes such as EU-4Health Programme and Erasmus+.

Rationale

Many successful initiatives operate at the community level, often outside formal healthcare systems. Stronger connections between healthcare providers and community-based programmes can support prevention efforts and increase participation in physical activity, helping translate medical advice into practical opportunities.

Possible directions for action



Establish referral pathways between healthcare providers and community-based physical activity programmes.



Develop partnerships among health services, local authorities, and civil society organisations that promote active lifestyles.



Support initiatives that facilitate access to physical activity opportunities for different population groups.



Policy Objective

Promote healthy lifestyle policies that adopt a life-course perspective and integrate equity considerations, ensuring that opportunities for physical activity and health promotion are accessible to diverse population groups.

The analysis of good practices highlights important imbalances in life-course coverage, with early childhood and older populations comparatively underrepresented across initiatives. In addition, stakeholders participating in the Virtual Focus Groups emphasised the importance of inclusion and equitable access to healthy lifestyle opportunities. Addressing these gaps requires policies that explicitly consider different stages of life and the diverse social contexts shaping participation in physical activity.

The analysis also indicates that projects combining core sectors with equity-oriented approaches tend to demonstrate stronger sustainability, highlighting equity as a structural enabler of long-term impact

RECOMMENDATION D1

Integrate a life-course perspective in healthy lifestyle policies

Call on the European Commission and Member States to integrate a life-course approach into policies and programmes promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles across all stages of life, from early childhood to older age, including through alignment with EU policy frameworks and strategies such as the European Child Guarantee, the European Care Strategy, and through the use of coordination tools such as the European Semester.

Rationale

The analysis indicates that many successful initiatives operate through cross-sector collaboration. However, responsibilities often remain fragmented across ministries and governance levels. Establishing formal coordination mechanisms can support more coherent policy design and facilitate long-term implementation.

Possible directions for action



Promote early-life interventions that encourage active lifestyles among children and young families.



Support programmes that facilitate physical activity participation among older adults.



Integrate physical activity within broader strategies on education, ageing, and community wellbeing.



Rationale

Stakeholders in the Virtual Focus Groups highlighted that participation in physical activity is often influenced by socioeconomic inequalities, access to infrastructure, and community context. Embedding equity considerations into policy design and funding allocation can help ensure broader access to healthy lifestyle opportunities and contribute to reducing health inequalities across population groups.

RECOMMENDATION D2

Strengthen equity and inclusion within healthy lifestyle policies

Call on the European Commission and Member States to design and implement physical activity policies that systematically address socio-economic, environmental and cultural barriers to participation, including through targeted measures for disadvantaged groups and the use of EU funding instruments such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Cohesion Policy programmes.

Possible directions for action



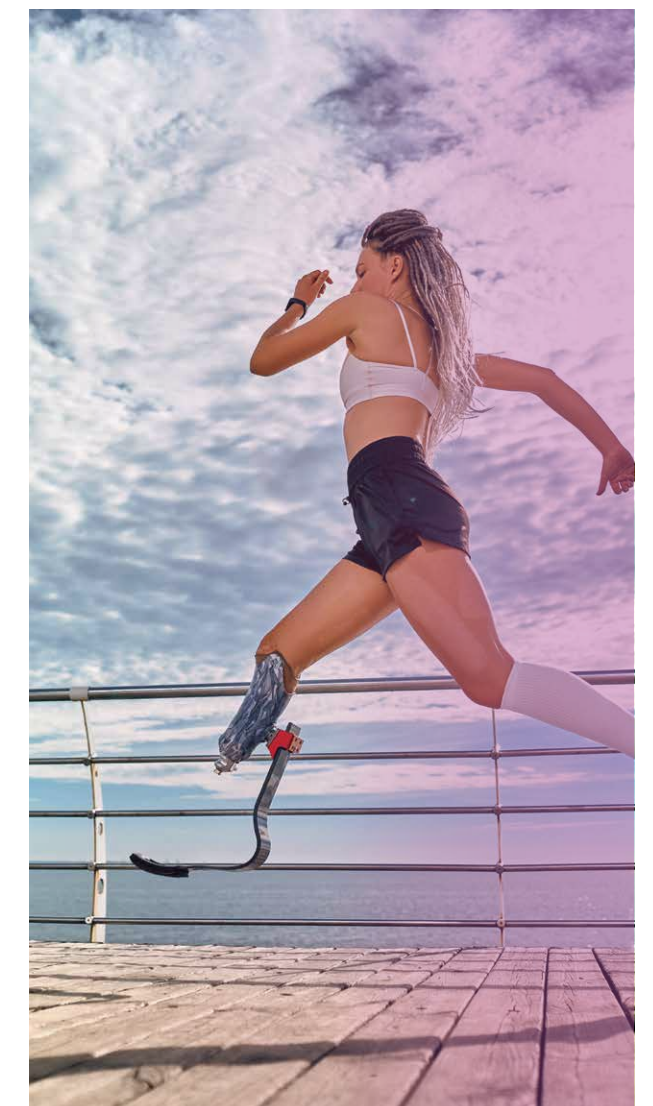
Promote inclusive design of physical activity initiatives that consider diverse social and demographic contexts.



Address barriers related to accessibility, affordability, and local infrastructure through targeted policy measures.



Support community-based initiatives that foster participation and local ownership of healthy lifestyle programmes.





Evidence, Impact Measurement & Prevention Framing

Theme E

Policy Objective

Strengthen the evidence base and impact measurement frameworks supporting healthy lifestyle promotion, while improving the policy framing of prevention as a long-term public investment.

The project evidence indicates that preventive health initiatives often face difficulties in demonstrating short-term impact and return on investment. Both the good practice analysis and the Virtual Focus Groups suggest that preventive actions — including physical activity promotion — are frequently undervalued in policy and funding decisions due to limitations in measurement systems and evaluation frameworks. Strengthening evidence generation and improving the framing of prevention can help support more informed policy decisions and long-term investment.

Rationale

Many initiatives promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles generate positive outcomes that extend beyond traditional health indicators, including social participation, wellbeing, and community cohesion. However, these impacts are not consistently captured in policy evaluation systems. Strengthening shared evidence frameworks can improve the visibility, comparability, and policy relevance of preventive interventions.

Possible directions for action

RECOMMENDATION E1

Strengthen evidence systems supporting healthy lifestyle policies

Call on the European Commission, Member States, and relevant EU agencies to strengthen common monitoring, evaluation, and evidence frameworks for healthy lifestyle policies, including by integrating broader health, social, and economic impact indicators into EU-level coordination processes (such as the European Semester) and by supporting research and innovation through programmes such as Horizon Europe and EU-4Health.



Develop harmonised monitoring and evaluation approaches for healthy lifestyle initiatives.



Develop indicators capturing broader social and wellbeing outcomes associated with physical activity.



Strengthen collaboration between research institutions, public authorities, and implementing organisations to strengthen data collection and knowledge sharing.

RECOMMENDATION E2

Promote stronger policy framing of prevention and healthy lifestyles

Call on the European Commission and Member States to strengthen the strategic framing of prevention and healthy lifestyles as long-term public investments, including through integration in national health strategies, economic policy coordination and EU funding programmes.

Rationale

Participants in the Virtual Focus Groups noted that preventive policies often struggle to compete with more immediate policy priorities because their benefits unfold over longer timeframes. Reframing prevention in terms of economic, social, and societal value can help strengthen its visibility in policy debates and support more stable investment.

Possible directions for action



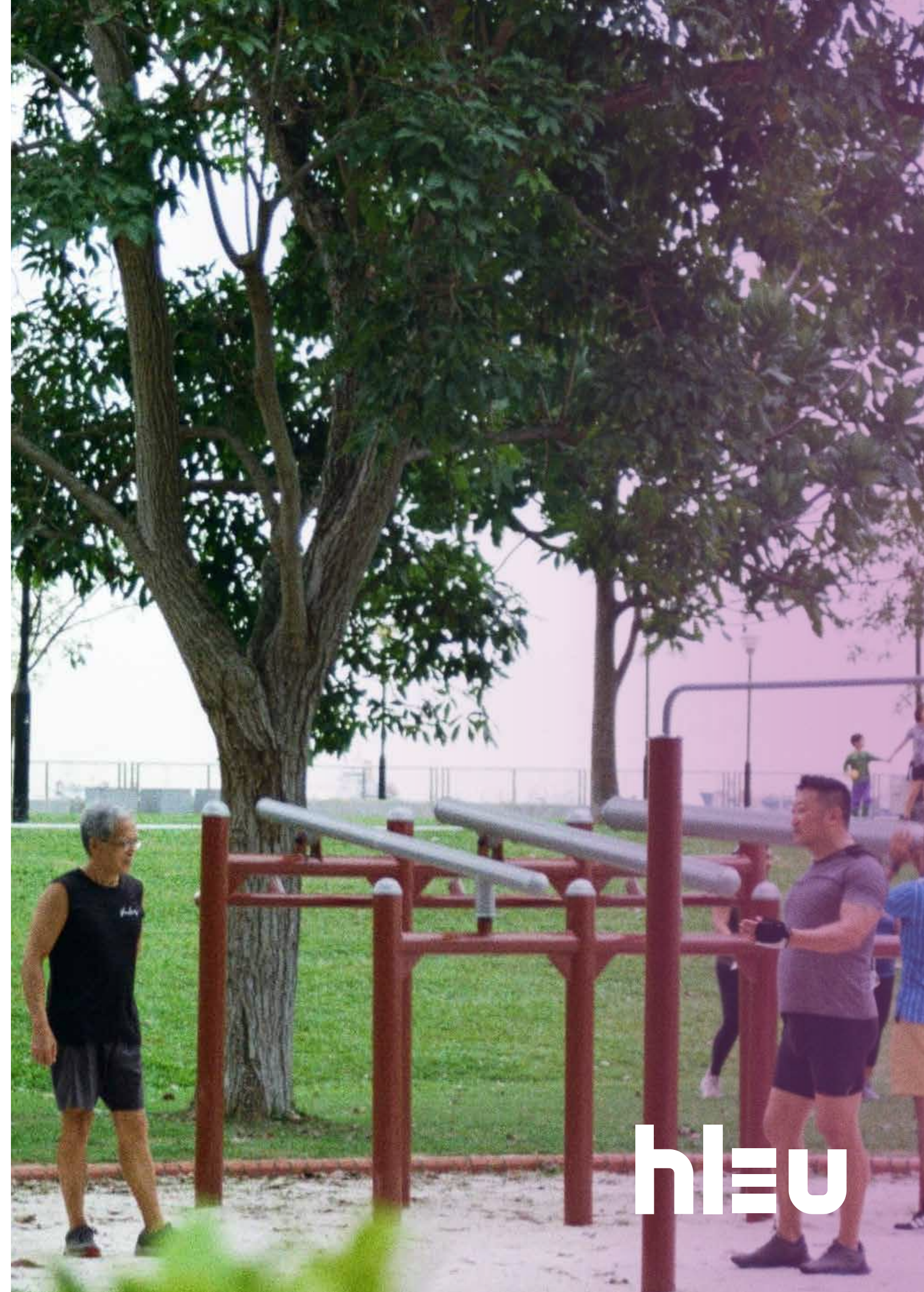
Develop policy communication strategies that highlight the long-term benefits of preventive health measures.



Integrate economic and societal impact perspectives within prevention policies.



Strengthen knowledge exchange between sectors to strengthen the understanding of prevention as a shared policy objective.



Policy Objective

Expand sectoral participation and whole-of-society approaches to healthy lifestyle promotion, recognising that sustainable health outcomes depend on collaboration across multiple policy domains and societal actors.

Many initiatives are structured around a core triad of physical activity, health, and community sectors, which supports impact but may require broader sectoral engagement to enhance sustainability and scalability.

The good practice analysis shows that many initiatives successfully combine Physical Activity, Health, and Community sectors. However, participation from other sectors such as environmental sustainability, mobility, culture, and urban planning, remains comparatively limited. Expanding cross-sector engagement can help strengthen integrated approaches to healthy lifestyle promotion and address the complex social and environmental determinants of health.

This theme focuses on broadening participation across sectors and societal actors, complementing governance and funding mechanisms.

Rationale

Healthy lifestyle promotion is shaped not only by health and sport and physical activity policies, but also by decisions related to mobility, urban planning, environment, education, and community development. Strengthening cross-sectoral integration can support more coherent and systemic approaches that improve population-level access to physical activity opportunities.

Possible directions for action



Strengthen collaboration between health, mobility, environment, education, and urban planning sectors in healthy lifestyle strategies.



Develop integrated policy approaches linking physical activity promotion with active mobility, green spaces, and community infrastructure.



Establish cross-sector policy dialogue platforms that facilitate collaboration across diverse sectors.

RECOMMENDATION F1

Encourage broader sectoral integration in healthy lifestyle policies

Call on the European Commission and Member States to strengthen cross-sectoral policy coordination for healthy lifestyle promotion, ensuring systematic involvement of sectors such as mobility, urban planning, environment, education, and social policy, including through European Green Deal, Urban Agenda for the EU and other existing and future initiatives.

Rationale

Many successful initiatives identified in the HL4EU project operate through strong community engagement and partnerships with civil society organisations. These actors often play a key role in mobilising participation, building local ownership, and adapting initiatives to local contexts. Strengthening their role within policy frameworks can help improve both the reach and sustainability of healthy lifestyle initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION F2

Strengthen community engagement and civil society participation

Call on the European Commission, Member States, and local authorities to strengthen structured involvement of community organisations, civil society actors, and grassroots initiatives in the design, implementation, and evaluation of healthy lifestyle policies.

Possible directions for action



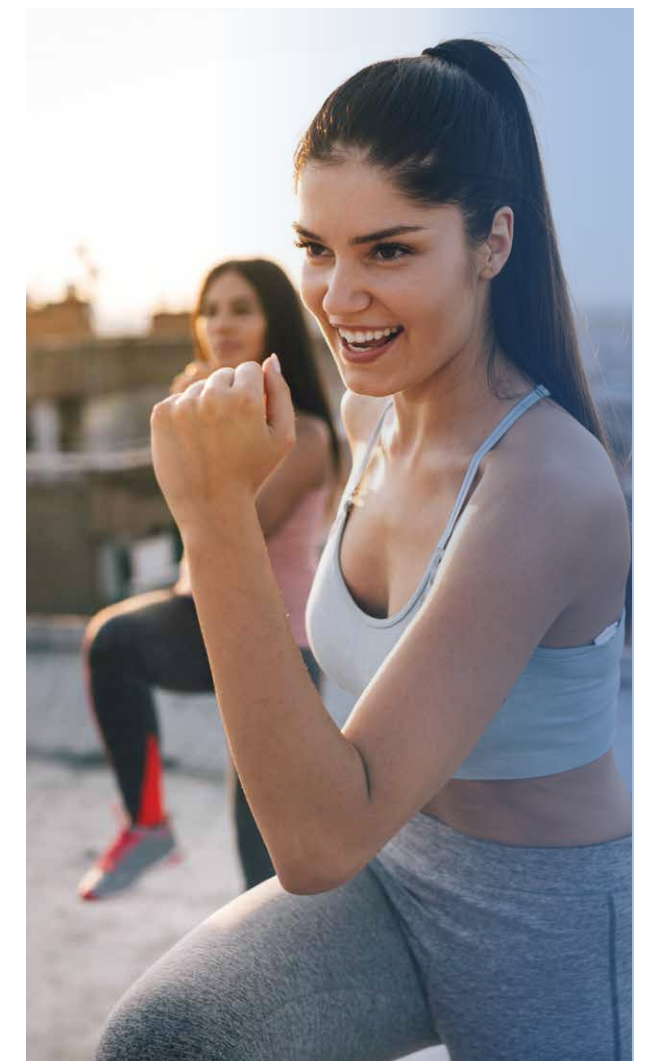
Develop partnerships between public authorities, civil society organisations, and community-based initiatives.

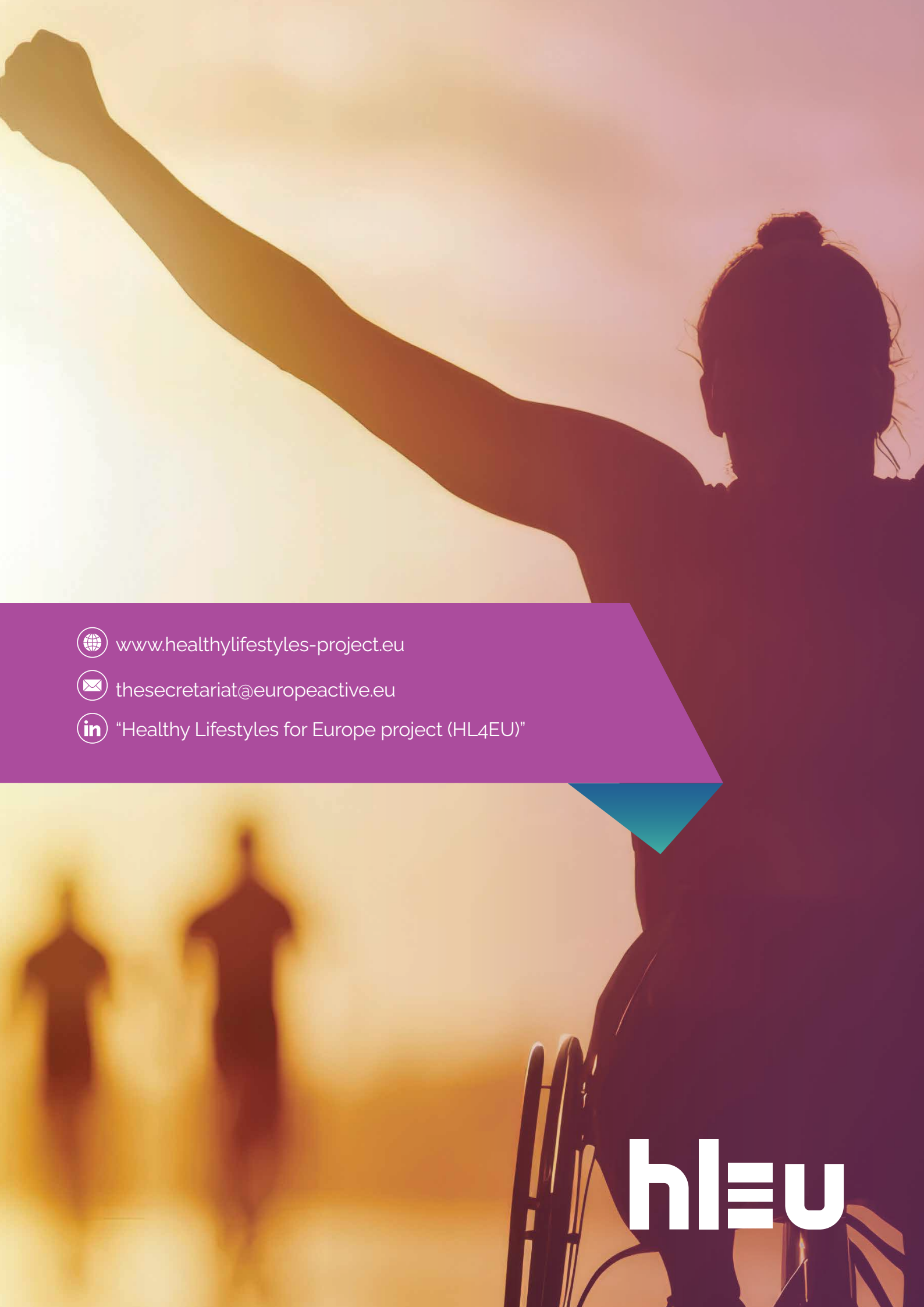


Establish mechanisms that facilitate community participation in the design and implementation of healthy lifestyle programmes.



Strengthen local initiatives that support community ownership and participation in physical activity promotion.





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