



**NOVEMBER 12, 2024,  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
(BRUSSELS)**

# **EVENT REPORT**

**“Re-thinking health in the EU for improved access to quality diabetes prevention and care”**

**Hosted by MEP Peter Agius (EPP, Malta)**

**Diabetes  
Awareness  
Month 2024**



**International  
Diabetes  
Federation**  
Europe

# BACKGROUND

Diabetes represents a major health burden on individuals, health systems and societies. Across the EU, 32 million people – nearly one in 10 – live with diabetes, forecast to increase to 33 million by 2030. Expenditure on diabetes, meanwhile, stood at €104bn in the EU in 2021. What is more, one third of people living with the condition remain undiagnosed, potentially leading to them developing life-altering complications.

On November 12, during the 2024 World Diabetes Day Week, IDF Europe organised a breakfast event at the European Parliament, hosted by MEP Peter Agius (EPP, Malta). Titled “*Re-thinking Health in the EU for Improved Access to Quality Diabetes Prevention and Care*”, the event convened people with lived experience, policymakers, public health experts, healthcare professionals (HCPs) and other stakeholders to explore the transformative actions required at national and EU levels to drive equitable access to effective diabetes management and prevention. The event was also streamed live.

# SPEAKERS

- **MEP Peter Agius**, EPP, Malta
- **Prof. Tadej Battelino**, IDF Europe
- **Martina Boccardo**, IDF Europe
- **Prof. Xavier Cos**, Primary Care Diabetes Europe – PCDE Chairman
- **Prof. Johan Jendle**, Institute of Medical Sciences, Örebro University, Sweden
- **Dr. Susan Connolly**, Health Service Executive HSE, Ireland
- **Cameron Keighron**, Type 1 diabetes advocate
- **Dr. Niek Klazinga**, Health Services Researcher
- **Sergio Paoletti**, Type 2 diabetes advocate

*Moderated by: Sabine Dupont (Director of Policy & Strategy, IDF Europe)*

Participants: 35 in-person, 26 online

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Diabetes is a major public health challenge, requiring immediate attention. Tackling it requires adopting a two-pronged approach: identifying early people at risk of diabetes, and implementing policies that will help lower the risk for people already living with the condition of developing potentially life-altering complications, such as cardiovascular diseases.
- Barriers to effective prevention and management include lack of healthcare professional education, fragmented approaches and lack of (timely) access to the required medicines, technologies and care.
- The interconnectedness between diabetes and other NCDs requires a transversal, integrated and person-centred approach to prevention and management, which also takes into account the unique characteristics and needs of each one of the conditions.
- Ambitious action and political will coupled with strong leadership addressing healthcare systems' fragmentation and silo-thinking and supporting more research and innovation are required to lead the required transformation of healthcare systems.
- People must be placed at the core of healthcare systems and policies and be fully engaged in the design of solutions that build on their needs and preferences.

## EVENT PROCEEDINGS

In his opening address, MEP Peter Agius remarked that diabetes is one of the foremost public health challenges of our era. Offering insights from a Maltese perspective, MEP Agius stressed the fact that diabetes is a marker of healthcare system resilience and underlined the value of prevention and early intervention; every Euro invested in diabetes care today could save ten Euros in the future.

He also called for stronger political will and coordinated efforts at both national and European levels to address diabetes in the upcoming legislative mandate.

People living with type 1 and type 2 diabetes then highlighted, in the form of video testimonials, the key barriers and opportunities they face in their everyday management of diabetes, drawing specific attention to the need for:

- **Improved access to technologies and diabetes educational tools,**
- **Effective implementation of person-centred care models**
- **Strengthening of screening programmes and**
- **Enhanced training for HCPs**

## SETTING THE SCENE: KEY ACTIONS TO TRANSFORM DIABETES CARE

**Prof. Tadej Battelino**, IDF Europe Chair-elect, urged policymakers to accelerate action on diabetes, highlighting the condition's interconnectedness with other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and notably the need to lower the risk of key diabetes complications such as cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), kidney diseases, and dementia.



In particular, Prof. Battelino called for immediate action on:

- **Reducing inequalities in diabetes care**
- **Promoting innovation and research**
- **Enhancing prevention through early action**
- **Strengthening the resilience of healthcare systems**
- **Empowering people living with diabetes (PwD)**

# NATIONAL DIABETES PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE EU: A SITUATION ANALYSIS

**Martina Boccardo**, IDF Europe Strategic Content & Communications Coordinator, presented the findings from a situational analysis of diabetes prevention and management practices across Europe. The study examined national approaches to health policies including accessibility to, and affordability of, medicines, technologies and care (education, psychological support, structure), as well as healthcare system organisation and readiness (registries, digitalisation, education).

The findings highlight key gaps in diabetes prevention and care. These include the lack of some effective healthy living policies, such as sugar taxes; disparities in access to regular screening for complications, particularly between rural and urban areas or when the onus is on people to seek screening; inequalities in access to newer self-management technologies; inconsistent use of e-health services; the absence of comprehensive diabetes registries; insufficient specialised training and prescribing rights for diabetes nurses; and unequal access to diabetes education, peer support and psychological support for some PwD.

Resulting key recommendations were as follows:

- Foster health enabling environment
- Strengthen complication screening programmes to reach all PwD and reduce inequalities
- Expand access to new diabetes technologies across all the EU countries
- Scale up innovation and novel approaches to diabetes care and prevention
- Broaden the remit of diabetes specialist nurses
- Improve access to structured diabetes education and psychological support

*“To build resilient and sustainable healthcare systems, we must bridge the gaps in diabetes prevention and care, removing barriers to ensure that all PwD and those at risk have timely access to the tools and support they need to achieve optimal health outcomes and an improved quality of life”.*

Martina Boccardo, IDF Europe

# BEST PRACTICES IN DIABETES AND NCD PREVENTION AND CARE: A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

**Prof. Xavier Cos** and **Prof. Johan Jendle** went on to discuss the best practices in diabetes prevention and care.

***Q: What do we need to do to improve the identification of people at risk and diagnose them early?***

**Prof. Cos** underlined the importance of leveraging best practices across Europe relating to the identification of people at risk and the implementation of prevention strategies within primary care settings. He highlighted the proactive role that primary care practitioners can play in screening at-risk populations and tailoring specialised interventions.

**Prof. Jendle** added that undiagnosed diabetes significantly increases the risk of complications, often leading to hospital admissions or emergency care—outcomes that could be mitigated through effective prevention and early detection.

***Q: Given the importance of acting at the right time with the right treatment to lower the risk for people living with diabetes of developing complications but also, if they do live with co-morbidities of reducing the burden of management, what would you say are good/best practices in that area to manage the condition and ensure good access for all?***

Both highlighted Finland as a leading example. Once one of the countries with the highest prevalence of CVDs, the country successfully reduced this number through increased diabetes awareness and comprehensive risk factor management.



# IMPLEMENTATION OF AN NCD STRATEGY – THE IRISH EXAMPLE

**Dr. Susan Connolly** of Ireland’s Health Service Executive (HSE) presented the country’s integrated care model for the prevention and management of chronic diseases. She gave an overview of the prevention and chronic diseases programmes implemented at primary care level in Ireland. The National Framework for the Integrated Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease in Ireland 2020-2025 is an innovative programme aimed at providing “end-to-end” care for individuals living with chronic disease and multimorbidity in the community. The programme focuses on prevention, early detection and proactive management of chronic diseases and relies on a coordinated approach between different levels of care and services (community care, specialist ambulatory hub, hospital care).

The chronic disease programme, which is in operation in more than 92% of GP practices, has delivered notable successes, including a 16% reduction in chronic disease-related hospital admissions and a 3.5% decrease in overall medical admissions between 2019 and 2023.



## PANEL DISCUSSION – THE WAY FORWARD

**Cameron Keighron** kick-started the panel discussion by highlighting the importance of empowering PwD, particularly young individuals who face a lifetime of managing the condition. He emphasised the significant mental and physical burden of managing diabetes, which requires PwD to make up to 200 extra decisions every day. He also called for the creation of supportive communities to help PwD share experiences and solutions.

***Q: What do you see as the key barriers to implementing changes within your healthcare systems for improved prevention and management across NCDs?***

**Sergio Paoletti**, Type 2 diabetes advocate, described diabetes management as a highly complex challenge requiring a multifaceted approach. He advocated for parallel strategies to tackle the main barriers to change and effectiveness: addressing interconnected components individually while ensuring collaboration across sectors. He pointed out the limited implementation of sugar taxes in Europe. Sergio also underscored the role of top-down action from Brussels in fostering change, particularly through supporting research.

**Dr. Niek Klazinga** reflected on the challenges of driving systemic change at the EU level, noting the lengthy process of healthcare reform. He highlighted the importance of governance and data in supporting earlier diagnosis and integrated care.

**Dr. Susan Connolly** discussed Ireland's journey in shifting care closer to communities, a process requiring significant investment in chronic disease prevention and management. She underlined how strong leadership was instrumental in underpinning this transition. Susan noted that while the benefits of such reforms are not immediate, the long-term impact on healthcare outcomes justifies the effort.

***Q: What do policymakers need to know in order to decide on healthcare system transformation / adoption of innovation or any other actions that support an improvement in prevention/management?***

**MEP Peter Agius** spoke about the EU's competencies in health policy, explaining that while the EU cannot mandate direct healthcare reforms, it can play a pivotal role in promoting the exchange of best practices. He shared his personal advocacy for CGMs in Malta as an example of how political pressure can bring about change. He urged advocates to actively engage decision-makers and equip them with the arguments needed to prioritise diabetes.

**Prof. Tadej Battelino**, meanwhile, emphasised the importance of early screening for type 1 diabetes and integrating technologies to prevent complications and manage the disease more effectively. He also highlighted the need for investment in population-level screening to reduce the burden of diabetes-related chronic conditions.

Highlighting the need for cost-savings alongside improvements in health outcomes, **Prof. Johan Jendle** discussed the potential of emerging technologies such as smart insulin pumps. He stressed the importance of ensuring the security and reliability of such devices.

**Prof. Xavier Cos** underlined the critical need for strong leadership to drive progress. He pointed to the potential of initiatives such as the European Health Data Space (EHDS) to enhance interoperability between e-health systems and support better policy decisions.

Also highlighting the importance of the EHDS and data as a whole, **Dr. Niek Klazinga** reiterated the need to prioritise data infrastructure and secondary data use to inform policies. He also called for targeted efforts to reduce health inequalities by identifying and supporting the most vulnerable groups.



**Cameron Keighron** stressed the importance of involving PwD in the redesign of healthcare systems, arguing that policies and reforms must reflect the lived experiences of those they aim to serve. Without this involvement, he warned, healthcare systems risk being unfit for purpose.

The panel ended with **Sergio Paoletti** highlighting the need for cross-sectoral coordination, arguing that diabetes is not only a health issue but also a societal challenge involving food systems, agriculture and research. He called for collaboration across EU departments to ensure cohesive policies.

# CLOSING REMARKS AND CALL TO ACTION

**Prof. Tadej Battelino** expressed his gratitude to MEP Peter Agius for hosting the event, the media for covering it, and the IDF Europe team for their contributions. He added that with the knowledge and resources available, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to drive meaningful change.

**MEP Peter Agius** concluded by thanking the IDF Europe team and his own office. He encouraged greater collaboration and proposed building on the 2022 European Parliament Resolution on Diabetes. He called for the appointment of diabetes ambassadors at both national and EU levels, highlighting the importance of securing allies to drive the agenda forward.



*We wish to thank Air Liquide, Lilly Diabetes and Novo Nordisk for their support to this event. IDF Europe extends its heartfelt thanks to the speakers and participants of this event.*

