

NEW POLICY APPROACHES IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR

The Preventia project aims to reduce health inequalities and prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs), with a particular focus on cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, across the European Union. It promotes cooperation and knowledge exchange across Member States through training, networking and awareness-raising activities, with the aim of improving health literacy, supporting vulnerable groups and advancing effective prevention policies.

Policy Problem

Non-communicable diseases remain the leading causes of preventable illness and death in the EU. Many of these conditions could be avoided through stronger prevention measures targeting key risk factors such as unhealthy diets, alcohol use, physical inactivity and tobacco consumption. Despite progress in healthcare, the continued burden of NCDs highlights the need for more effective prevention policies across Member States.

Evidence from the Project

The analysis of Preventia pilot countries (i.e., Croatia, Greece, Italy and Lithuania) highlighted several strong national initiatives that could inform future NCD policies at both national and EU level. Examples included community-based prevention programmes, efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, and initiatives supporting physical and mental health.

At the same time, common challenges such as limited prevention funding, weak implementation, poor health system integration and persistent inequalities underline the need for stronger policy action.



Key Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations seek to support more effective public health policies at both EU and Member State levels by strengthening NCD prevention and reducing health inequalities.

1. Develop comprehensive, evidence-based national action plans

Member States should implement or update funded national NCD plans covering prevention, early detection, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. These plans should include clear targets, responsibilities, resources and monitoring mechanisms. They should be tailored to national needs while aligning with EU initiatives and WHO-recommended interventions.

2. Address health inequalities through a focus on social and commercial determinants of health

Member States should adopt policies that reduce exposure to unhealthy products and make healthy food choices more accessible and affordable, particularly for vulnerable groups. Priority measures include restricting the marketing of foods and beverages high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS), especially to children, and using fiscal policies to incentivise product reformulation. At EU level, the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) should establish binding, harmonised rules to protect children up to the age of 18 from HFSS marketing across traditional and digital media, including influencer and targeted advertising. These measures should be supported by healthier food environments and effective monitoring and enforcement.



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3. Invest sustainably in prevention and health systems strengthening

Member States should increase investment in health promotion, prevention, early detection and integrated care to improve long-term health outcomes and sustainability. They should strengthen health systems to ensure universal access to high-quality care and reduce financial barriers. Priority investments should focus on primary and community care, workforce capacity, digital health and data systems.

4. Establish robust monitoring, evaluation, and data systems

Member States should establish common indicators and interoperable data systems to monitor NCDs, risk factors, outcomes and health inequalities. They should strengthen registries and collect disaggregated data to improve understanding of population needs and track progress. Regular evaluation and public reporting should inform policy updates, support benchmarking and promote the sharing of effective practices.

5. Strengthen intersectoral collaboration and local implementation

Member States should integrate NCD prevention across all relevant policy areas, including education, food systems, transport, urban planning and social policy. Effective implementation requires cross-sector coordination, shared goals, funding and accountability. Prevention efforts should be prioritised in key settings such as schools, primary care, workplaces and local communities.

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