Joint statement of the European Heart Network, the European Stroke Organisation and the World Heart Federation

WHO RC 76 agenda item 11, "Toward a strategy and action plan for tackling noncommunicable diseases and advancing well-being through health promotion in the WHO European Region 2028-2037" (EUR/RC76/16).

The European Heart Network, together with the World Heart Federation and the European Stroke Organisation, gives its full support to WHO's vision for a strategy and action plan to tackle non-communicable diseases. Promoting public health and ensuring that people can live in healthy environments are fundamental to reducing these diseases, particularly cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death globally and in Europe. Across the WHO European Region, it kills around 10,000 people every day, with heart attacks and strokes accounting for most deaths. This is not something to be proud of.

Yet up to 80% of premature cardiovascular diseases can be prevented. Realising this potential requires strong public health policies that create healthy environments and address the underlying determinants of cardiovascular health.

Our starting point must be to ensure that people who are born healthy have every opportunity to stay healthy. They must be able to live healthy lives, regardless of where they are born or their gender. Living longer is not enough: our ambition must be more years lived in good health. Treating people who suffer from stroke and cardiovascular diseases is extremely expensive, especially when this could have been prevented. CVD costs the EU countries 280 billion Euro per year, it is much more in the wider WHO European region. Investing in policies and environments that support healthy lives from the start helps prevent cardiovascular disease and reduces treatment and stroke rehabilitation costs, while complementing essential screening and care. Strengthening hypertension screening, treatment, and management helps to achieve 50% hypertension control across the region by 2030. Likewise, the Stroke Action Plan for Europe 2018–2030 with its measurable targets and comprehensive approach provides a framework for national stroke plans and for reducing inequalities.

The WHO vision presented today was already outlined in the Ottawa Charter for health promotion in 1986; but requires a budget for implementation and the adoption of regulatory measures that create the conditions for healthy living.

This means looking honestly at the environments in which children grow up. How can we expect them to remain healthy when tobacco and vaping products, alcohol and unhealthy foods are abundantly promoted to them, in particular through social media? Nicotine, alcohol and ultra-processed foods cause

addiction and then ill health mainly hypertension and stroke. And yet industries are allowed to promote these products to children and adolescents. Air pollution is a significant threat to cardiovascular health. It leads to heart attacks, hypertension and stroke. These are examples of pressures that individuals and families cannot tackle alone. They require a whole-of-society response.

Public health measures addressing the production, promotion, sale and distribution of health-harming products (tobacco, nicotine, alcohol, unhealthy foods)are therefore essential. WHO's best buys, WHO's quick buys, WHO's air pollution guidelines are well known and give excellent guidance on what to do. Yet they are still not implemented. All measures mentioned here are equally important to achieve the goal of living in good health. What is needed now is a political commitment, a budget and enforcement measures to put them into practice.

It also requires a change in our thinking and better consideration of who's interests are at stake. We should question why producers of health-harming products are given a seat at the policy table when measures to protect health are discussed. The need to shield public health policymaking from commercial interference and conflicts of interest is high. Respecting FCTC article 5.3 is a good example of what can be done.

We can do better. We must do better. We urge Member States in cooperation with civil society to act responsibly and create environments that allow children to grow up healthy, and people to remain healthy throughout their lives. Implementation this strategy and action plan is a first step in that direction.