

Speech by Health and Food Safety Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis at the kick-off meeting of the CHRODIS PLUS Joint Action on chronic diseases

Dr Galea,

Dr Szocska,

Distinguished members of the CHRODIS PLUS consortium,

Like-minded friends,

It is a true pleasure for me to speak to you today, to launch our second European joint action on preventing and addressing chronic diseases – CHRODIS PLUS.

I am particularly pleased to join the Minister in welcoming me back to my home country.

Here in this room, we are well aware that chronic diseases kill half a million adults each year in the EU – according to recent OECD figures.

So many of us don't even notice how and when from a 'healthy' person we shift to someone suffering from a chronic disease, because we have been slowly but gradually been affected by the risk factors around us and our own unhealthy lifestyles. Sometimes it is still possible to steer the wheel to a more healthier life direction. But sometimes it is also too late.

And it is a shame because chronic diseases, that inflict so much suffering on our citizens; and stop people from working and contributing to society are largely preventable.

Plus they also represent a major burden on European health systems, accounting for 70 to 80% of healthcare budgets.

The European Commission is determined to support Member States to reach the targets on non-communicable diseases set by the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

Many of these are about addressing the risk factors: reducing tobacco, alcohol consumption, and salt intake, improving the levels of physical activity – and ultimately reducing mortality caused by the related chronic diseases.

Many of these are also about early prevention, early diagnosis, and early treatments.

All countries in Europe need to focus more on keeping healthy people in good health for as long as possible; by addressing these risk factors.

Investing in promoting good health across the life cycle, pro-actively monitoring people's health and preventing diseases: this is my prescription for better health; more people at work; lower healthcare costs.

Plus we need to reach out to the most vulnerable in society on our efforts to promote good health.

To succeed here, we need to work across policies to create the conditions that enable people to make healthy choices. For example, to make healthy food – or sports centres – easily available and affordable to all.

I very much expect our joint action CHRODIS PLUS to be an important pillar in this process.

The World Health Organization has recently analysed the progress made so far towards reaching the targets I mentioned – and I welcome the presence of WHO Europe here today.

On the positive side, I am pleased that, overall, mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease is going down.

At the same time, I am deeply concerned that health inequalities are widening. In this context, it is unlikely that Europe will meet the targets of halting the rise of the diabetes and obesity and achieving a 30% relative reduction in tobacco use.

This is why it is so important that all of you will be working closely together under this new joint action.

As its name suggests, CHRODIS PLUS builds on its predecessor, CHRODIS: it aims to use and implement the results from CHRODIS – for example on health promotion.

This reflects my words of encouragement at the CHRODIS conference last February; and I am pleased that so many concrete activities at local and regional levels are planned by the countries participating in this new action.

This will make a real difference to the lives not only of patients but also of healthy citizens.

This focus fits very well with our work at EU level. I have set up a dedicated Steering Group on Health Promotion and Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases composed of Member States' representatives.

This group will advise on how to implement best practices and also select best practices for future implementation in the Member States.

My aim is to help Member States take inspiration from successful practices

developed in other Member states and pilot such practices at home.

I believe the time has come to move on from simply “exchanging best practices” towards “transferring and upscaling best practices”.

Our aim is to turn words into actions and concrete improvements on the ground.

CHRODIS PLUS will lead the way and I look forward to hearing of your experiences.

For example, I would like to see how Andalusia in Spain will take on board good practices from Lombardy in Italy to promote healthy eating, physical activity, smoking cessation and reduction of alcohol consumption.

I am also interested on how Lithuania is taking up the “Active School Flag” action from Ireland to promote physical activity in schools.

I would also like to hear from Iceland, on how it adapts at home the Dutch “JOGG” programme addressing child and youth obesity.

And because healthy lifestyles start at birth, I am keen to learn about Malta’s implementation of the Greek “ToyBox” project for healthy snacking and physical activity in kindergartens.

Finally, I am also curious to see how the care model for multi-morbid persons developed in CHRODIS will work in practice.

Your pilot experiences in Italy, Spain and Lithuania will provide us with guidance for a wider roll-out.

Let me take this opportunity to warmly thank the Spanish Institute of Health, “Carlos the 3rd”, for coordinating CHRODIS PLUS.

I also thank the Lithuanian Ministry of Health and the Vilnius University Hospital Santaros Klinikos for hosting us today.

I am grateful that you have taken on the scientific leadership of CHRODIS PLUS as well as chairing the Governing Board and providing its secretariat. It is important that the newer EU Member States take leading roles in joint actions.

And I very much look forward to hear the results of CHRODIS plus’ policy dialogues at national and EU levels.

These national dialogues can blend well with the voluntary dialogues foreseen as part of the “State of Health in the EU” cycle.

I would encourage you to seek collaboration with the OECD and the European Observatory on Health Policy and Systems in this respect; and to make use of the country profiles we will present in November this year.

I am also pleased that CHRODIS PLUS reaches out beyond the health sector and

will address the issue of employment of people suffering from chronic diseases.

This work will contribute to the European Pillar of Social Rights initiative which seeks to pave the way for a more social, more inclusive and fairer European Union, leaving no one behind.

I also very much welcome that you will be piloting in primary care in Spain and Bulgaria a mhealth tool developed in Germany.

As you know, the Commission is keen to develop the potential of eHealth solutions and will present a Communication on transformation of health and care in the Digital Single Market.

A public consultation on digital innovation for better health and care in Europe is ongoing – and I would encourage you all to participate in this consultation which closes on 12 October.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are just starting a new action – but it is important to plan, right from the beginning, for when the joint action ends.

I am pleased that CHRODIS PLUS plans to deliver a consensus statement on the EU added value of cross-country collaboration to prevent chronic diseases and the sustainability of the results of this joint action.

A good example is the planned incorporation of the collected “best practices” into the best practice portal that the Commission is now developing. This will help provide sustainability to the good work done.

I also encourage the CHRODIS PLUS consortium to ensure the active participation of civil society organizations in addition to those present today.

Civil society makes an important contribution to people’s health and can provide valuable insight from the patients’, health professionals’ or academics’ point of view.

I wish you a fruitful and inspiring kick-off meeting.

I look forward to seeing this Joint Action deliver concrete results for our citizens.

Keep on the good work! Thank you.