

Blueprint of the European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy & Asthma

This document reaffirms the commitment of the European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy & Asthma to help improve research, prevention and care to the benefit of people living with allergy and asthma in Europe. It encourages the incoming legislature of the European Parliament following the elections in May 2019, and the current and incoming European Commission leadership to become ambassadors of the allergy and asthma cause and help shape policies and environments that improve the response to the diseases, making progress happen.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT ALLERGY & ASTHMA: spotlight on highly prevalent diseases

Over 150 million EU citizens live with chronic allergy whether food or respiratory allergies, making it one of the most common chronic diseases in Europe (1 in 3 Europeans). 70 million people have asthma and 17 million live with a food allergy. Allergy and asthma are one of the most common diseases in childhood. One in four children under 10 years live with allergy. This high prevalence has important socio-economic consequences: the total spend on asthma alone in Europe is estimated at €72.2 billion per year; and in a near future, the economic impact of the diseases might reach a non-maintainable cost for healthcare systems if no action is taken. Estimates predict that by 2025, half of the entire EU population will have allergy and asthma.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS FOR POLICY ACTION: encapsulating know-how

In 2017, the Interest Group co-initiated a [call to action](#) together with the medical and patient communities, highlighting key unmet needs on allergy and asthma. The actions proposed were associated with policy recommendations to the EU institutions, the Member States and the civil society to reduce the impact of allergy and asthma on the lives of patients and on our societies.



Source: United Action for Allergy and Asthma – a European political Call to Action

DELIVERING CHANGE: the opportunity of the EU policy mandate

The Interest Group promotes an innovation-driven Europe that protects citizens from allergy and asthma and effectively supports those living with the diseases. This vision can be achieved by integrating the health perspective and the needs of people with allergy and asthma in all EU policies, ranging from clean air, the Common Agricultural Policy, circular economy and transport policies to frameworks which address employment, gender equality or social rights. Representing European citizens, the European institutions have a responsibility to develop legislative and policy frameworks that will deliver an economically and socially sustainable forward-looking Europe that offers equal chances to all people for a fulfilling and productive life.

A key tool to intensify and accelerate the implementation of a better response to the diseases is the establishment of pan-European Centres of Excellence in allergy and asthma to guide the implementation of national programmes in Europe, communicate about the root causes, and scale up best practices for prevention, management and care that would help improve patients' quality of life.

Since its creation in 2015, the Interest Group has included Allergy and Asthma considerations in the EU agenda and contributed to raising awareness on the issues affecting patients, yet much remains to be done. The European Parliament legislature 2019-2024 can champion allergy and asthma in EU policies; and the European Commission can bring health priorities to the forefront of its agenda to be a true leader in health prevention, care and research worldwide.

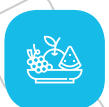
Chronic diseases need to be considered in every policy

A healthy population is not just the result of a good healthcare system, but an outcome of a society that prevents. To get a healthy Europe we need to invest in cross-sectoral healthy policies.



Allergy, asthma & transport and the environment

Our health is connected to the environment we live in. The burning of fossil fuels, vehicle emissions or environmental tobacco smoke release health harmful particles such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide or particulate matter into the air that cause respiratory diseases and reduce the lung function. Only in 2015, 380,000 EU citizens died due to air pollution from PM2.5, the biggest human toll from a man-made activity impacting nature. The EU can adopt win-win policies to promote outdoor environments that protect citizens from allergy and asthma, such as cleaner transport and mobility options, energy-efficient housing, improved waste management in urban areas and overall urban planning, tobacco-free environments, or reduced agricultural waste incineration. Indoor environments can also be the result of smart regulation, with allergy-friendly policies in the field of climate change, circular economy, energy efficiency, and sustainable transport.



Allergy, asthma & agriculture and food

A healthy diet plays a key role in the prevention of major chronic diseases including asthma and respiratory diseases, but healthy food is not just a dietary choice for people living with food allergy such as milk, egg or peanut allergies. Those can result in considerable morbidity, impairment of quality of life and healthcare expenditure, yet there is no cure for food allergies but the abstention from the allergen causing the reaction. People with food allergies can only rely on first-class EU traceability that ensure the food products they consume are safe for them, as well as clear ingredient labelling in all foods so that they can easily identify allergen information, including non-prepacked foods. People with food allergies call on stronger systems to notify cross-contamination in the food chain from harvest to packaging, better use of the precautionary 'may contain' allergy labelling, and the definition of ingredient thresholds.



Allergy, asthma & sensitizers in consumer products

Most of the products we use for everyday care contain chemicals. While the EU assesses and authorises the safety of chemical substances used in cosmetics and other products, such as personal hygiene products, detergents, textiles, they might contain ingredients that can cause irritation and allergic reactions in people. Cutaneous symptoms such as atopic eczema, urticaria, and contact dermatitis and in respiratory symptoms such as asthma have a severe impact on health if the exposure is long term. Consumers need an improved chemical assessment and labelling in commercialised products, as well as the identification of sensitisers to restrict their use and limit exposure of groups at higher potential risk, such as children and pregnant women.



Allergy, asthma & research, big data, and digital health technologies

Research is the pillar informing the response to allergy and asthma and it needs resources to drive better understanding of these diseases, improve diagnostics and treatments, and to inform healthcare service planning and delivery. New digital technologies bring enormous potential for the understanding of complex diseases such as allergic diseases and can enable personalised medicine. Big data, and digital health revolutionize the self-management of allergic diseases and support individual preventive measures and therapies. E-learning tools are also increasingly important in medical education, to improve the management of allergic patients, referral and maintain standards of care.



Allergy, asthma & employment, social inclusion and inequalities

Chronic diseases significantly impact the productivity of the European labour market with sick leave, job turnover and early retirement. Chronic diseases are not only responsible for economic loss, they also impact quality of life, disrupt social participation and increase inequalities. Every year, asthma and allergic rhinitis are responsible for 100 million lost work and missed school days in Europe. Absenteeism at work due to insufficiently treated allergy costs an estimated €55-151 billion/per year across the EU. Through protective environments, including preventive measures at the workplace, the EU can promote not only safe environments free from exposure to pollutants, but also arrangements to fully involve people with allergy and asthma in the labour market.