

ACHIEVE

ASSOCIATIONS COLLABORATING ON HEPATITIS TO
IMMUNIZE AND ELIMINATE THE VIRUSES IN EUROPE

The *ACHIEVE* (short for *Associations Collaborating on Hepatitis to Immunize and Eliminate the Viruses in Europe*) coalition comes together to speak with one voice representing patients and community, clinicians and researchers. It calls for political action to eliminate viral hepatitis B and C by 2030 in the WHO European Region, in line with the WHO Global Health Sector Strategy on viral hepatitis, the WHO Europe Action Plan, which build on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LAUNCH OF ACHIEVE COALITION TO ELIMINATE HEPATITIS WITHIN A GENERATION

MEETING REPORT

The **ACHIEVE** coalition was launched in the European Parliament on 7 June.

Austrian S&D MEP Karin Kadenbach opened proceedings by reminding participants how the European Parliament is championing the fight against viral hepatitis. In 2007, it endorsed a written declaration on Hepatitis C. Now, it is set to adopt a resolution on the EU's reponse to HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Hepatitis C in its July plenary.



Tatjana Reic and Karin Kadenbach MEP

Tatjana Reic, the chair of the ACHIEVE coalition and president of the European Liver Patients' Association, explained the coalition's political ambition. "By 2030, we would like the health threat of viral hepatitis to be eliminated from the WHO Europe region in line with the WHO Global Health Sector Strategy and the WHO Europe Action Plan."

NEED FOR DATA



Professor Jeffrey Lazarus

Prof Jeffrey Lazarus, ISGlobal, University of Barcelona, stressed the urgency of establishing an accurate picture of the scale of viral hepatitis: "The first lesson to be drawn is the need in all countries to collect core data, in order to take effective measures and assess progress made" he said, emphasising that these data should be based on comparable WHO indicators.

In parallel, he urged governments to develop and implement national strategies and plans, in line with calls from the 2014 World Health Assembly. The recent HepCore survey by the European Liver Patients' Association, he pointed out, revealed that only 11 European countries have a national plan.

NEW POLITICAL DECLARATION

Luis Mendão, European AIDS Treatment Group and member of the ACHIEVE coalition, urged governments to renew the 2004 Dublin Declaration to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia by extending its political commitment and practical action to include viral hepatitis and TB. Adopted under the auspices of the EU Irish Council Presidency, the Dublin Declaration was instrumental in introducing a harmonised surveillance system for HIV/ AIDS in the WHO Europe area to monitor progress in the fight against the disease. This is currently lacking in viral hepatitis where diagnosis is much lower, Mr. Mendão explained.



Luis Mendão

He called for a pan-European conference in 2018 to draft a new Declaration which should address all 53 members of the WHO Europe Region and southern Mediterranean countries.

Mr Mendão complimented the European Parliament for "showing leadership" in the fight against viral hepatitis and challenging "member states and the Commission to take the right approach".

COOPERATING AND COMMISSION INPUT



Jean- Luc Sion

European Commission official, Jean-Luc Sion, representing the Directorate General Health and Food Safety, explained how the remit of the Civil Society Forum and the Think Tank is being extended to include viral hepatitis and TB.

Established in 2005, the forum is an informal advisory body involving NGOs and networks from all over Europe in policy development and implementation, and exchange of information. The Forum cooperates with the Think Tank, where both EU Member States and neighbourhood countries are represented. The first meeting of both bodies in the revised format will take place in Luxembourg on 20-21 June.

As part of the forum's new remit, EU funding, initially used to finance studies on HIV/AIDS, is being extended to include viral hepatitis and TB. In September, a new joint action covering all three diseases will be launched.

This forms part of the Commission's wider commitment to monitor implementation of the UN's sustainable development goals. To achieve that, it is essential to have more accurate data on the prevalence of viral hepatitis – an issue which will be on the forum's agenda.

Mr Mendão confirmed he looked forward to collaborating closely with the Commission and others in the new forum and its ancillary think tank. Any initiatives should be based on human rights and affordability and special efforts made to reach out to marginalised groups most affected by the disease, both inside and outside the EU, he stressed. Mr. Mendão's comments were echoed by Eberhard Schatz from Correlation Network, a member of the ACHIEVE coalition. Mr. Schatz called for representatives of those marginalised groups to be included in the discussion on how to move forward on elimination.

Portuguese MP Ricardo Baptista Leite delivering a video message from Lisbon, pledged his support to the ACHIEVE coalition. "Eliminating viral hepatitis is not just a belief, but is possible based on the knowledge that we have," he said, emphasising the importance of basic political will to achieve this goal.

As the founding president of the UNITE parliamentarians' network to end HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis, supported by UNAIDS, Mr. Baptista Leite underlined the need for cooperation and collaboration. "I believe if we all come together, we can push this agenda forward."

His comments were echoed by MEP Carlos Zorrinho, who confirmed the importance of cooperation to actually deliver on elimination beyond the European Parliament's Resolution.



Carlos Zorrinho MEP

WAY AHEAD

Bringing proceedings to a close, Mrs Reic focused on ways to give teeth to the future HIV/AIDS, TB and viral hepatitis declaration ACHIEVE is seeking.

She urged stakeholders to use the new Civil Society Forum to spell out in greater detail the contents they would like to see. She also appealed to representatives of national health ministries and agencies present to convince their governments to politically support a new declaration covering these three diseases.

ACHIEVE consists of the following organisations: the European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA), the Viral Hepatitis Prevention Board, Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association, EASL International Liver Foundation, European Aids Treatment Group (EATG), Correlation Network, the World Hepatitis Alliance and the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal).



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