

WEBINAR REPORT

**IMPROVING
DIABETES
OUTCOMES AND
QUALITY OF LIFE
FOR PWD**

IF NOT NOW WHEN?

25 JANUARY 2022



INTRODUCTION

On January 25, IDF Europe in collaboration with the MEPs Mobilising for Diabetes Group (MMD) held a webinar focused on what it means to live with diabetes today while addressing the need for, and relevance of, a new diabetes narrative to build back better. The discussion focused on the complexity and burden of diabetes, its daily management and how EU initiatives can be leveraged.

Dr Niti Pall, IDF Europe's Chair and the webinar's moderator, welcomed all participants and introduced MEP Christel Schaldemose, MMD's co-chair, who outlined the work of this cross-party interest group to improve the lives of people living with diabetes (PwD) and reduce the incidence of the disease across the European Union. Christel Schaldemose called on national and pan-European policymakers *"to tackle the diabetes challenge and avoid costly complications, recognise the disease as a key priority and provide bold leadership to effect the necessary societal, structural, and organisational changes"*.

Maartje Roskam, a Type 1 Diabetes (T1D) advocate proceeded to give a moving testimonial on her experience of living with T1D since the age of 15. Maartje gave an overview of the heavy psychological and physical burden of this disease that requires *"round-the-clock management seven days a week in order to survive"*. Despite the huge advancement in diabetes-related care and technologies since the discovery of insulin and their resulting improvement of PwD's quality of life, much remains to be done to overcome discrimination, improve access, support healthy living and improve digital literacy. Maartje called on policymakers to act as *"we, PwD, need help, support and access to care to manage our diabetes as the weight is too heavy to carry alone"*.

Prof Dr Chantal Mathieu, EUDF President and endocrinologist at KU Leuven, illustrated the complexities surrounding the types, causes, symptoms and management of diabetes. Diabetes is characterised as a group of diseases that make blood glucose levels rise. After explaining the specificities of T1D, T2D and other forms of diabetes, Chantal Mathieu proceeded to explain the need for early diagnosis in order to prevent costly and serious complications such as blindness, foot amputations and cardiovascular diseases. Chantal Mathieu concluded that *"we need to emphasise the important role of research which is under the scope of the Commission and the Parliament to improve the lives of PwD in the years to come"*.

Dr Niti Pall, Physician and Chair of IDF Europe briefly presented the burden of diabetes in Europe which affects over one in ten Europeans (31.6 million people living with diabetes). The region also has the highest number of children and adolescents living with T1D. Niti Pall highlighted the impact of the condition on the lives of PwD and the huge economic burden of diabetes on health systems in the EU, accounting for €104 billion in 2021. Niti Pall urgently called MEPs to mobilise and reiterate the fact that prevention is cost-effective and can free up scarce limited resources for better use. ***“PwD account for the third-largest number of potentially avoidable hospital bed days spent in Europe among chronic diseases”***. Lastly, Niti Pall stressed the issue of stigma resulting from the general lack of awareness about diabetes hindering diabetes management and increasing the risk of worse health outcomes if not managed properly.

Dr Jill Farrington, Regional Medical Officer for CVD and Diabetes for WHO Europe, presented the implementation of the Global Diabetes Compact in Europe. This global multistakeholder initiative, coinciding with the centenary of insulin ***“aims at reducing the risk of diabetes and ensuring that all people who are diagnosed have access to equitable, comprehensive, affordable and quality management”***. The WHO Europe region will be involved in five specific areas in the context of this initiative which are the assessment of diabetes; partnerships with relevant stakeholders; support of Member States in technical matters; communication to raise public awareness and the reduction of inequalities by addressing the socioeconomic/cultural determinants of health.

Lastly, Sabine Dupont, Senior Policy Consultant at IDF Europe, presented the relevance of diabetes in EU programmes, legislative proposals and initiatives. She highlighted some of the many opportunities for action to make a difference in the health outcomes of PwD and the diabetes epidemic. The three main dimensions which can influence the lives of PwD are prevention, screening/diagnosis, and the management of diabetes and complications. Sabine Dupont outlined the several policies in the EU that can be leveraged to ***“ensure that the needs of PwD are included in the right policies”***. The newly launched European Commission’s EU NCDs initiative, Healthier Together, ***“provides tremendous opportunity for the diabetes community to come together and provide their perspectives on key priorities, and paves the way for specific action that can make a real difference in the EU”***. Sabine Dupont urged all stakeholders to call and push for this initiative to be an ambitious programme supported by the Parliament.

MMD Co-Chair, MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, closed the session by calling on cross-institutional & cross-country collaboration to address the diabetes burden in the EU – ***“there is an urgent need to prioritise diabetes awareness, prevention and care to improve the health outcomes of a disease that affects 10% of the EU population”***. Sirpa Pietikäinen mentioned the highly problematic issue of diabetes costs being incurred in the wrong place. There is a need to invest more resources in prevention and optimal care, resulting in lower costs and burden for society. And if not now, when ?