

Brussels, 15 January 2025

## **Stakeholder Webinar EU cardiovascular health plan**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate, and congratulations to the Commission for the Safe Hearts Plan.

This Plan matters. It recognizes the scale of cardiovascular disease, the urgency of prevention, and, crucially, the need to move beyond traditional policies and invest in education, early detection, digital tools, and personalized approaches.

By explicitly bringing these dimensions into the Plan, the Commission has set the right strategic direction, and we stand ready to contribute.

The emphasis on health literacy, AI, data, devices, and innovation is particularly important. It reflects an understanding that cardiovascular health requires a shift from traditional policy tools toward smarter prevention, better knowledge, and more informed citizens.

But let me be very clear.

The risk is not a lack of ambition. The risk is that, in implementation, we look for shortcuts.

At this point, a strategic choice emerges.

Do we want a top-down, dirigiste, one-size-fits-all model, where behavior is engineered through classifications, reformulation, taxes, and simplified narratives, as we are increasingly seeing in the UK, with what is becoming a form of state-led food re-engineering?

Or do we want a European model that reflects the Union's core values: freedom, diversity, competitiveness, and innovation?

Because cardiovascular prevention is not about declaring what is "good" or "bad" food, it is about enabling people to find their own balance.

This logic is already reflected in the Plan's focus on harmful use when it comes to alcohol policy. Science consistently distinguishes between harmful and responsible consumption, showing that moderate consumption can fit within a balanced lifestyle, with very different impacts on health outcomes.

Empowering citizens means giving them knowledge, context, and critical thinking, not delegating choices to labels, algorithms, or fiscal penalties. When prevention replaces complexity with simplification, we risk undermining trust, innovation, and ultimately competitiveness and entrepreneurship, especially in a Union built on diverse cultures, diets, and lifestyles.

This is why the real opportunity of the Safe Hearts Plan lies in how it will be implemented.

Today, the document still places a strong emphasis on nutrition, often starting from an implicit assumption: that cardiovascular diseases are primarily caused by nutrition. But evidence tells a more complex story. Only around 25% of cardiovascular risk is directly attributable to nutrition.

This is why we need more political space for physical activity, education, healthier environments and behavioral prevention across the life course.

We also know that taxes, labels, and reformulation incentives, on their own, do not solve the problem. Data show that they often generate unintended consequences, including market distortions, social polarization, and regulatory escalation.



This is particularly evident in the growing focus on so-called ultra-processed foods. UPFs are not a scientifically robust category. They turn a complex health challenge into a binary classification. This debate is divisive, politically charged, and ultimately a distraction. It increases regulatory complexity, fuels conflict and diverts attention from what truly improves cardiovascular health.

Instead, we should invest seriously in education, not as a symbolic banner, but as a core pillar of prevention.

Today, the tools finally exist. AI, data, connected devices, and personalized technologies are no longer theoretical.

For years, we have spoken about precision nutrition and personalised lifestyles. They are not coming. They are here.

We should use AI, data, and digital tools not to standardize behaviour, but to support personalised, evidence-based choices. We should move from prevention for citizens to prevention with citizens. And we should test, pilot, and evaluate policies in real life, avoiding irreversible measures before evidence is mature.

Concretely, this means creating a space where independent scientific networks, responsible industry, innovators, and policymakers work together on implementation, not just consultation. A space where prevention policies are stress-tested against real behavior, real diversity, and real trade-offs.

We must avoid arriving in three or four years with a regulatory framework already obsolete, trapped in classifications and taxes, while citizens are interacting daily with AI agents whose most intimate data are managed outside Europe, and whose algorithms escape European governance.

Let us not miss this opportunity.

Europe should move beyond today's policy frameworks and take leadership in a new model of prevention, one that empowers citizens, embraces innovation, and leads the global transition toward personalized health.