



Event summary report

'A new direction for allergy and asthma health in Europe'

20 November 2019, European Parliament



On 20 November, the European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma held its first meeting of the 2019-2024 legislature.

The policy roundtable entitled 'A new direction for allergy and asthma health in Europe' explored the way forward across key policy areas in addressing allergy and asthma, two of the most prevalent chronic diseases in Europe affecting over 150 million people. Speakers and participants discussed the economics of prevention, air pollution & respiratory health/allergies, and research & precision medicine.

Co-hosted by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and committed members of the Interest Group, Sirpa Pietikäinen (Finland, EPP) and Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (Romania, EPP), the event brought together policymakers, medical professionals, patient representatives, academics and representatives from the private sector.

MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen opened the meeting by calling for better national programmes and their implementation, early action to protect our biodiversity, and improved urban environments to prevent allergies and asthma. She highlighted the need for increased efforts on air quality, both indoor and outdoor, and for ensuring better consumer information about chemicals in our daily environment and food ingredients, concluding that we should enter a new era where no one suffers from allergy and asthma.

From the economic case for improved prevention to concrete policy steps

In the first session moderated by Prof Marek Jutel the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) President, Head of Health Determinants and International Relations Unit of the European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) Wojciech Kalamarz made a case for the potential of prevention from a health economics perspective, stressing that citizens' health influences economic outcomes in terms of human capital and prosperity. Yet, despite the cost-effectiveness of preventive measures, countries dedicate limited funding to prevention. Mr Kalamarz outlined the European Commission's work on health promotion and prevention and related support to Member States and stressed that disease prevention will be a priority for the incoming Commission.



Prof Ioana Agache, Past-President of EAACI highlighted the undeniable cost-effectiveness of prevention. To improve prevention in the field of allergy and asthma, she called for multi-sectoral policies that tackle the interconnections between human, animal and plant health, and food and water safety, in line with the exposome factor, as allergy and asthma are multifactorial diseases associated with both individual-genetic factors and biological responses to a variety of environmental factors.

Exploring concrete policy steps, Salvatore D'Acunto, Head of Health Technology and Cosmetics Unit of the European Commission Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) provided insights into the ongoing impact assessment process on fragrance allergen labelling. Recognising the critical importance of measures in this area for patients, the annexes of the regulation are constantly updated to include new chemicals and substances. Mr D'Acunto stated that the Commission is currently considering different on- and off-product labelling options and invited stakeholders to respond to the ongoing public consultation on fragrance labelling.

Air pollution and health: building on independent research to inform policy change



Susanna Palkonen, Director of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) moderated the second session focusing on air quality. Dr Dorota Jarosińska, Programme Manager for Living and Working Environments at the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, shared an update on the most recent activities of WHO in the field, further to the landmark 'First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health' that took place at the end of October 2018. Accordingly, WHO global air quality guidelines are being updated in order to empower countries with a public

health guidance based on latest scientific evidence. The guidelines are expected to be finalised next year. Going forward, Dr Jarosińska said that linking allergy and asthma health together with air quality and climate change agendas will be essential, as these encompass concurrent challenges that need to be tackled simultaneously to achieve progress.

Dr Jean-Luc Wietor, representing the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), addressed the necessity for the new EU Green Deal to tackle especially climate change. Its top driver, the combustion of fossil fuels, is also a major direct or indirect cause of allergy and asthma – therefore, decarbonisation of human activities will lead to a significant improvement in air quality. A key aspect determining the success of the Deal, according to Dr Wietor, will be connecting the various EU instruments addressing different sources of emissions, including transport, industrial activity, agriculture and urban heating and cooking.



MEP Karima Delli, Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN), made important remarks on how air pollution contributes to high mortality rates and the prevalence of non-communicable diseases in Europe. She also stressed that the climate change agenda should go hand in hand with air quality and health, and that emissions from transport need to be reduced without further delay, to protect children who are most vulnerable to the health impact of air pollution. As the Chair of TRAN Committee, she pledged to have a plan in place against diesel-fuelled transportation before 2030 and called not only for more investment in clean transport but also for more courageous policymaking.

Prof Stefano del Giacco, EAACI Vice-President Education and Speciality, then presented the perspective of healthcare professionals and medical societies, calling for independent evidence-based policymaking to set minimum air quality standards and provide efficient city planning to reduce risks associated with exposures. For further improvements in the field, he also touched upon the value of registries, innovative approaches making use of integrated surveillance networks, systems-based models and machine-learning to monitor allergens.

Research & precision medicine for better allergy and asthma care: towards implementation science

Dr Eva Untersmayr, Chair of the EAACI Basic and Clinical Immunology Section moderated the final session on research and precision medicine, which opened with the perspectives of Dr Cristian-Silviu Buşoi, Interest Group co-chair and Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI). As allergy and asthma continue to take a heavy toll on both the lives of patients and the sustainability of healthcare systems, Dr Buşoi outlined that there is a clear need to better translate research findings into direct improvements to patients' care. He referred to the field of allergology, which has played a leading role in advancing the personalised and precision medicine approach since the beginnings of allergen immunotherapy about 105 years ago. Significant headway has been made ever since, but it is time to ensure that advances are scaled up across Europe. In this regard, Dr Buşoi stressed the value of the increased budget allocated to healthcare research in Horizon Europe at the initiative of the ENVI Committee and expressed his hopes that this can contribute to accelerating the implementation and uptake of personalised medicine in allergy and asthma care. Further, he highlighted how the personalised approach can make considerable advances in preventive and predictive medicine, and how the EU efforts to foster e-health, use of innovative digital technologies, and cross-border exchange of data can all contribute to improving outcomes for patients.

Dr Amalia Irina Vlad from the European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) presented the three pillars of Horizon Europe, underscoring that the allergy and asthma community needs to seize the opportunity of the enhanced Horizon Europe budget, contribute to the development of the programme and utilise results of research projects across different fields which can add value to allergy and asthma health.

Talking from a regulatory perspective, Prof Vera Mahler from Paul-Ehrlich-Institute shared reflections on keeping a balance between the personalised medicine approach and regulatory requirements. She noted that regulators are very open to new diagnostics and products, and that regulatory tools for marketing authorisation of personalised medicines are ready to be applied to precision medicine in allergy and asthma care. However, research is needed to address the existing gaps between biomarkers and clinical outcomes, as the European Medicines Agency guideline for market authorisation allows new treatments only as long as results are validated and correlated with clinical outcomes. She therefore reiterated the importance of investing more in research efforts, especially those assessing the clinical effect of personalised approaches.

Prof Marek Jutel, EAACI President then discussed how the precision medicine approach can be optimally implemented at the level of healthcare systems. He highlighted the importance of translational research and real world evidence in fostering the integration of basic, patient-oriented and population-based research results. Prof Jutel gave the example of the EAACI Research and Outreach network as an innovative tool facilitating data sharing and harmonisation of research and clinical practice. Data available from healthcare records, registries and biobanks should be explored as they have the potential to bring considerable advances.

Representing the patients' voice, Mikaela Odemyr, President of EFA stated that personalised medicine, which offers hope for patients, should be made accessible for all, with a new paradigm that places the patient's needs at the centre. On the basis of a recent EFA report, she noted that inequalities in access to healthcare are still a major barrier to improving patient outcomes and quality of life.

A discussion on the costs of personalised medicine and how to make it accessible for all patients ensued in the Q&A. Prof Mahler stressed that investment in personalised approaches is worthwhile as inefficient medicines come at a greater cost in the long term. In view of the dramatic increase of the allergy and asthma prevalence expected in the near future, it is evident that better treatments and medicines will be needed to fight these epidemics.

The panellists concluded the meeting with hopes that the discussions of the roundtable will inform future policymaking across different policy areas, and help improve the response to the ever-growing individual, societal and economic impact of allergy and asthma in Europe.

