



Statement of the WFN to progress equity in health and access to neurological care at the 69th WHO-Europe meeting 2019, Copenhagen on the needs of patients in Europe living with neurological diseases.

This statement was prepared by the World Federation of Neurology with the aid of the European Academy of Neurology which represents the European Regional Organisation of the WFN and the specialty societies for neurology and brain health.

Link:

Accelerating progress for equity in health in the context of Health 2020 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development towards “leaving no one behind” in the WHO European Region

Statement:

Neurological disorders comprise diseases of the brain and the neuromuscular system and represent the significant part of the non-communicable diseases (NCDs), varying greatly in their symptoms such as muscle weakness, loss of sensation, poor coordination, seizures, confusion, pain, cognitive deficits and altered levels of consciousness. Neurological diseases can occur due to genetic, neurodevelopmental, vascular, inflammatory, neoplastic, traumatic, neurodegenerative causes, but many diseases are still classified as idiopathic (i.e. without known cause). Neurological diseases can occur at any age, but for several diseases such as stroke, Parkinson disease and dementias incidence and prevalence increase with age, that makes it even more relevant in the ageing world.

The data from the Global Burden of Disease database [hWp://ghdx.healthdata.org/](http://ghdx.healthdata.org/) shows a tremendous burden of neurological diseases in Europe. The burden of disease is expressed by the number of people living with a neurological disease in each region and is not only represented by prevalence numbers, but measures like DALYs (disability adjusted life years), YLLs (years of life lost), YLDs (years lived with disability) and deaths.

According to the data

- ✓ More than half of the European population (approx. 60%) suffers from a neurological disease;
- ✓ The death and disease burden due to neurological diseases is high and ranks number three among all disease groups in Europe.

However, major advances in prevention, diagnosis and treatment of many neurological diseases have been achieved or are on the horizon. The WFN (and the EAN) greatly appreciate the productive collaboration in important brain diseases, existing between the WHO and the ILAE (with the Global report on epilepsy recently published) as well as between the WHO and Non-State Actors in dementia, and in headache disorders (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/headache-disorders>), among others.

One of the most frequent diseases, stroke, is a good example of a neurological disease with successful advances in prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation. Such success was achieved by cooperation between clinicians and researchers and the support of health politicians.

The Joint statement of the WSO, ESO, WFN and EAN on stroke on the occasion of the 68th WHO-Europe meeting 2018, Rome, outlines several pillars of these activities, and formulated an Action Plan for Stroke in Europe 2018-2030, which is aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (European Stroke Organization 2018; European Stroke Journal 2018, Vol. 3(4) 309–336).

Unfortunately, the advances in stroke prevention and modern treatment are not equally accessible to patients across Europe and the same holds true for other neurological diseases. Attention must be drawn towards the equity of access to neurological care. In European countries with lower income, less health costs are covered and is often compensated by an increase of out of pocket payments that rise disproportionately to the income. The need to elaborate on the WHO concept “no one left behind”(<https://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/events/policy-to-practice/en/>) is necessary.

All patients should have access to neurological facilities for diagnosis and treatment, including new therapies. The high costs of new treatments must be offset by appropriate organizational efforts by the health systems.

One of the key elements for accepting preventative measures, seeking early diagnosis and appropriate use of therapies is the education of patients, carers and health professionals, and in a wider perspective the public. Highlighting topics on the World Brain Day (<https://www.wfneurology.org/world-brain-day>), such as stroke, epilepsy, and this year, migraine, helps local, national and regional societies to raise awareness.

Patients and carers need to be empowered in their journey with neurological disease based on fairness. They should have equal access to specialist neurological care when necessary and strong support by appropriately educated primary care professionals.

The WFN with the EAN respectfully ask the European Member States, the European WHO Headquarters and the WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of NCDs to address the growing burden of neurological disease, which demands increased efforts for funding neuroscience research and concentrated efforts by national health systems to follow examples of good practice from other countries.

There is a need to:

- ✓ Facilitate diagnosis and access to care in neurology
- ✓ Provide equal access to neurological care.
- ✓ “No one must be left behind”
- ✓ Educate and empower patients
- ✓ Facilitate research

References: to be found in the text