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The EU Cardiovascular Health Plan

16 DECEMBER 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, the European Commission published a Communication on the EU's Cardiovascular Health Plan (The Safe Hearts Plan). This is the Commission's EU-level strategy to reduce the burden of cardiovascular diseases (CVD) and related conditions, notably diabetes and obesity, by stepping up prevention, improving early detection and screening, and strengthening treatment, care and rehabilitation - while supporting Member States and respecting national competences.

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BACKGROUND

Today, the European Commission published a Communication on the EU's Cardiovascular Health Plan (The Safe Hearts Plan). The Plan is available [here](#).

The Commission's press release can be found [here](#), a Fact Sheet [here](#) and Q&A [here](#).

Its goal to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death in the EU, through prevention, early detection/screening, and improved care and rehabilitation. Announced as a follow-up to Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the initiative focuses strongly on prevention by targeting unhealthy behaviours.

SUMMARY (as per the Commission's language)

Strategy and structure

The CVD plan is organised around three pillars across the CVD pathway (1) prevention, (2) early detection & screening, (3) treatment & care (incl. rehabilitation). This is supported by three cross-cutting themes: digital/AI, research & innovation, and reducing inequalities.

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Pillar 1 - Prevention (“A Life Course and Personalised Approach”)

The Communication notes that there is currently insufficient focus on prevention. It highlights that tackling CVDs requires efforts across all age groups, but that specific challenges and trends among children and adolescents are of particular concern. It mentions that prevention is the “most cost-effective way” of addressing the significant burden of CVDs and the major risk factors, e.g. diabetes and obesity.

In particular, the following actions are highlighted:

- The Commission will launch **a flagship prevention programme: a lifelong, personalised, and digitally enabled prevention – the “EU cares for your heart”** programme. This will support Member States to develop or implement **national cardiovascular health plans by 2027**, using co-creation and capacity-building (with benchmarking of preventive cardiovascular spending via an EU-funded OECD project).
- The Commission **supports actions to improve dietary habits**, including through the food Practices, industry-led EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing (also called the Agri-food Code), as well as Food 2030, the research and innovation policy framework deployed under the Horizon Europe programme.
- **Ultra-processed foods:** the Commission has launched a study on the impact of the consumption of “so-called ultra-processed foods”, based on the opinions of the Scientific Advisory Mechanism (SAM) and of the European Group of Ethics (EGE).
- **Flagship initiative: empowering consumers through information on food processing in the EU:** The Commission will work towards a new comprehensive food processing assessment system, looking into portions, frequency of intake and role in the diet, to empower consumers with transparent, accessible, science-based digital information on food processing, with the aim to ultimately encourage shifts towards healthier diets.
- **Flagship initiative:** based on the outcome of the study on so-called ‘ultra-processed foods’, the Commission will examine which **appropriate tools, including possible financial actions**, could be deployed to support/fund public health actions in the field of **primary prevention** and **stimulate food reformulation** and **healthier consumer choices**.
- **Focus on children and young people:** Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to marketing on **so-called ‘ultra-processed’ foods and foods high in fat, sugar, and salt**, as well as tobacco and emerging products. The Commission refers here to the revision Audiovisual Media Service

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Directive which includes rules to protect minors from harmful content, by the end of 2026

- **Climate change and environmental factors, such as air or noise pollution** are also mentioned.
- **Health literacy** is mentioned as crucial to empower citizens to make informed decisions about their lifestyle and habits, to engage in personalised prevention and early detection to manage risk factors like high blood pressure and to seek timely help. To further these efforts, the EU-funded **European Code against Cancer** will be updated with recommendations for the **prevention of cancer and other non-communicable diseases** such as CVDs that share common risk factors.

Pillar II - Early detection and screening of those at risk

The Communication notes that there is currently limited access to early detection and diagnosis in the EU. Early detection is noted as essential because risk factors can go unnoticed, thus increasing the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Pillar III - Living with cardiovascular diseases – improving patient treatment and care

The Communication notes that patients with CVDs often require long-term management and a multi-faceted approach involving challenges that can impact patient outcomes.

PRESS STATEMENT

FoodDrinkEurope prepared a press statement. Please feel free to use it and adapt it, if approached for comment by press.

While the Plan's framing of so-called 'ultra-processed foods' remains ill-thought, the focus on proven solutions – such as enabling industry to accelerate reformulation efforts and improving education and health literacy – is positive. FoodDrinkEurope looks forward to working with the European Commission to support healthier dietary habits across Europe.

To ensure public policy is science-based, we expect the Plan will follow the outcome of the European Commission's study on so-called 'ultra-processed foods', as well as appropriate impact assessments. We trust this will be a transparent and balanced process that delivers truly positive health outcomes.

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TALKING POINTS

Please find below some further talking points from which to draw additional messaging:

- FoodDrinkEurope acknowledges that obesity is a global economic and societal problem that needs to be addressed and resolved. As obesity is a result of a multitude of factors, no single solution is likely to be effective in tackling it.
- A range of measures that help individuals make the required behavioural changes are necessary. These measures need to be systematic, not only aiming for an immediate impact on the net energy balance but also making sure that change is sustained.
- The food and drink industry supports positive food environments where initiatives empower consumers to follow more balanced diets, rather than punish them, for example through restrictions or discriminatory taxes. This includes education, measures that encourage innovation and food product reformulation, and the provision of clear and transparent consumer information to empower consumers to make informed choices that fit their individual diets and lifestyles. Discriminatory food taxes can have unintended effects – such as adding to consumer food bills or leading consumers to substitute products with no health improvement.
- There are better ways to help consumers choose more balanced diets. This includes education, measures that encourage innovation and food product reformulation, and clear and transparent consumer information.
- The term ‘ultra- processed foods’ is so confusing that not even experts can reliably understand it or use it. The concept of ultra-processed foods is highly disputed in both science and in public policy discussions.
- That’s why public authorities across Europe, including the UK, Nordic countries, and France, already rejected the use of ultra-processed foods as a basis for developing public health policy and in dietary guidelines because of:
 - A lack of robust evidence;
 - The UPF concept is too imprecise;
 - The risk of consumer confusion;
 - The risk in undermining existing public nutrition efforts;
 - A lack of scientific consensus.
- When it comes to ensuring good dietary health, well-established food nutrition science the world over, tells us that the best way to make an impact

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is to focus on the nutritional content of a food and how often we consume it, in conjunction with what type of lifestyle we lead.

- We must continue working with national authorities and other industries in their country's agri-food chain, through public-private partnerships, to promote better dietary patterns and improve the nutritional offering to consumers.

Recommendations on strengthening nutrition policy

1. **Reconsider using “ultra-processed” and related terminology in the final Plan** until the scientific assessment foreseen in the Vision for Agriculture and Food is completed, to preserve coherence and evidence-based policymaking.
2. **Avoid diverting attention from established public health nutrition principles:** emphasise improving overall dietary quality, supporting mindful management of total energy intake; increasing consumption of fibre-, protein- and micronutrient-rich foods, and reducing excessive calorie intake, alongside promoting regular physical activity.
3. **Reinforce the EU Code of Conduct** as a central instrument to drive healthier and more sustainable food environments through deeper collaboration between the private sector, national/local authorities and civil society.
4. **Set out concrete measures to support reformulation and innovation**, including enhanced EU R&I funding (where appropriate via public-private partnerships) and action to address regulatory bottlenecks slowing healthier options to market.
5. **Strengthen the enabling environment for responsible nutrition and health communication** by revising Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 to explicitly support balanced diets and informed consumer choices.
6. **Commit to strengthening nutrition education and food-literacy initiatives** that complement industry-led efforts, building on successful Member State experiences and practical, culturally adapted programmes.
7. **Commit to developing a robust EU-wide system for dietary intake data**, ensuring policy decisions are grounded in harmonised, real-world information and structured dialogue on data collection.
8. **Build on the Food Dialogues announced in the Vision** for Agriculture and Food, with a clear roadmap to strengthen trust, transparency and mutual understanding across stakeholders through an inclusive, science-informed platform.
