

Subject: Advocating for Health: New Stroke Alliance for Europe Manifesto

29/04/2024

Dear Minister, Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We hope this letter finds you well. We are writing to you as a constituent of Belgium, as stroke survivors and as a stroke patient advocate to encourage you, as we approach the European elections in June and if you are standing for re-election, to consider including stroke-related initiatives in your campaign programme and prioritizing them in the new parliamentary term.

Stroke is a life-threatening condition caused by inadequate blood flow to the brain. Every year, more than 610,000 Europeans have a stroke. Today, nearly 10 million people in Europe live with the impact of stroke, with up to half facing long-term disabilities. Besides the devastating human impact, the financial toll exceeds €45 billion, a figure set to rise without immediate action.

Enhancing treatment, care, and support can improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs, as 80% of strokes are preventable with effective legislation targeting risk factors. Timely, high-quality emergency response and long-term rehabilitation support are crucial for better recovery outcomes.

We are writing to share with you two pieces of information to support your work:

1. An outline of the key stroke issues, challenges and solutions in our country

Stroke = 80% preventable

- We need to establish **a national stroke plan** including promotion of a healthy lifestyle and evidence based screening and treatment programmes for stroke risk factors to lower the burden of stroke, but also of chronic diseases including cancer, cardiac events, and dementia because they share a lot of risk factors.

Time = Brain: earlier treatment of acute stroke leads to improved outcomes

- < 10% of patients across Europe arrive in hospital < 60 minutes after onset, the optimal time window for acute stroke treatment (i.e., "golden hour")
- Rapid access to acute treatment such as intravenous thrombolysis (IVT) and mechanical thrombectomy (MT) can reduce disability and long-term costs
- In Belgium only 11% of ischemic stroke patients are treated with IVT (target > 15%), 8% are treated with MT (target > 10%) (based on Minimal Hospital Summary data 2021).
- Early treatment starts with recognition of stroke symptoms. **Stroke awareness campaigns**, e.g. focusing on acute stroke symptoms (do you know "FAST"?) are needed in Belgium!
- A **national EMS** (emergency medical services/ 112) **stroke alert** that is used to notify hospitals prior to patient arrival should be implemented.
- Patients should be transported to a hospital with stroke expertise -**Accreditation of primary stroke centers (offering IVT) and comprehensive stroke centers (offering IVT and MT)** is needed

Measuring = Knowing

- National and/or regional data are crucial for planning, organizing and documenting access to stroke care.
- We absolutely need a funded and mandatory **national stroke registry**.

A life saved is a life worth living

- **Early stroke unit rehabilitation including early supported discharge** should be available for all patients in Belgium
- **A sector transition plan** should be provided to every stroke patient
- A **structured follow-up** of stroke patients at 3-6 months after stroke is needed including a post-stroke checklist and a functional assessment and referral for relevant interventions

2. The recently launched manifesto of the Stroke Alliance for Europe and the European Stroke Organisation. Their manifesto outlines our collective vision for enhancing stroke prevention, treatment and support across Europe.

Their manifesto highlights key areas of focus including increased access to preventive measures, and enhanced support for individuals affected by strokes.

We believe that by incorporating health, in particular stroke, into your electoral agenda, you can play a pivotal role in advancing these objectives, not only in our country but across Europe.

We would like to discuss the details of the document supplied and explore potential avenues for collaboration. We would be delighted to arrange a meeting at your convenience.

There is a lot of work to do!

Stroke is preventable, treatable and manageable! Let's do something about it together!

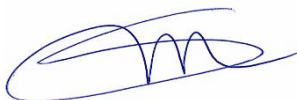
Warm regards,



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On behalf of the Belgian Stroke Council