

Patients' right to avoid pain: reducing the burden of COVID-19, promoting best practices across EU

EU Civic Prize on Chronic Pain - III Edition- Award Ceremony

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OPENING REMARKS

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Welcome and good afternoon also from me.

As you probably know, the commitment in the area of pain by my organization is strictly linked with one of the principles stated in the "[European Charter of Patients' Rights](#)", which is a milestone to advocate on health issues at EU and national level, based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The European Charter of Patients' Rights has been drafted in 2002 by Active Citizenship Network together with many associations. Even if none of us was only committed to the fight against pain, the highly sensitivity towards the respect of the person allowed us to state, among others, the **Patients' Right to Avoid Unnecessary Suffering and Pain**, as follows: "*Each individual has the right to avoid as much suffering and pain as possible, in each phase of his or her illness*".

Over the years, we have worked at European level to enlarge the constituency of advocacy groups in Member States that are active on the issue, and altogether we have also contributed to increase the commitment of the European institutions on the issue. The last European Council, Parliament and Commission have probably been the Institutions that, in the history of the European Union, have concretely demonstrated to be more attentive to the needs of the European citizens suffering from chronic pain, and this attention represents an important heritage for the current European Institutions that are called to continue and hopefully improve what their predecessors have done. And it is precisely to the current national and European institutions that we appeal today, so that the issue of the fight against pain appears not only among the health priorities established in the framework of the Recovery Plans of each Member State, but also in the debate fueled by the Conference of the Future of Europe.

At the end of April, Member States defined their Recovery Plan, a multi-year plan that will have a significant impact on future generations and all citizens, probably the main tool to guarantee more resilient Health Care Systems across Member States in the coming years. But to what extent will the fight against pain, cancer and not-cancer related, be addressed? How has the involvement of PAGs been ensured in the implementation phase of the Recovery Plan? What should people with chronic pain, who due to the pandemic have been even more neglected than usual, expect?

In line with the Conference of the Future of Europe, today Active Citizenship Network inaugurates its own concrete commitment on the subject, declared and started in May on occasion of the annual European Day of Patients' Rights, through a cycle of ad hoc European webinars aimed at placing

health-related issues at the center of the debate. The topic of today's webinar is the fight against pain, in order to make visible the invisible on chronic pain, while our second appointment in July will be focused on routine vaccinations.

Today we are particularly proud to award best practices on chronic pain collected across Europe and evaluated by an independent jury of experts that I want to thank for their support.

We like to think that good practices are a small, but significant indicator of the status of our healthcare systems, which have long been under pressure as they find themselves between the need for economic sustainability and the high expectations of the people. The protection of health as a common good should be the common denominator that unites the many stakeholders involved in the health sector, same as the fight against every form of inequality in access to therapies and the guarantee of the quality standards. The area of pain is no exception: reducing inequalities to allow a better quality of life for people suffering from chronic pain is the challenge we will face in the coming years. And in this regard, for us it remains valid the message underlined during the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2014: "It is of fundamental importance to guarantee access to pain therapy (...) to reduce the existing inequalities in healthcare between regions and Member States of the European Union in the area of equal rights to health"¹. We are trying to contribute to achieve this goal also through our initiative called "European Civic Prize on Chronic Pain Collecting Good Practices", which started in 2015 and is now at the end of its third edition. This is a unique project to raise awareness of existing innovative, exciting, and proactive practices in pain management services and pain education in Europe that provide solutions, support, and collaborations for people who suffer from persistent pain.

Like you, I am curious to learn more on the good practices that will be awarded today, and therefore I leave the table to our moderator Neda Milevska-Kostova, Vice Chair at International Alliance of Patients' Organizations (IAPO), who has long been a great partner of Active Citizenship Network and whom I thank in advance for accepting this role.

I wish you a fruitful webinar.

¹ Beatrice Lorenzin, IT Minister of Health, in occasion of the Informal Council of EU Health Ministers, 2014.