

Obesity Policy Engagement Network - EU (OPEN-EU) Statement on Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks

Obesity Policy Engagement Network - EU (OPEN-EU) welcomes the joint plan of action on [Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks](#) launched by the European Commission and the ECDC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control). The plan outlines key actions for the coming months to ensure Europe reinforces its preparedness to counter further outbreaks of COVID-19.

We are very encouraged to see that, in line with the growing body of evidence, the plan identifies obesity as one of the underlying health conditions in 'medically vulnerable groups', one of the categories of groups that are more susceptible to COVID-19. This is the first time, at an EU level, that people with obesity have been formally listed as being part of the category of 'medically vulnerable groups' "with underlying health conditions (e.g. hypertension, diabetes, obesity, etc.)"

We are also pleased to see the action areas that have been put forward in the new plan to support vulnerable groups, which are as follows:

- Design and implement specific high density, low threshold testing strategies for vulnerable groups & settings (Member States and ECDC)
- Sharing best practices in supporting COVID-19 prevention, testing and care in socially and marginalised groups and medically vulnerable groups and settings (European Commission & ECDC)
- Sharing of best practices and provision of mental health and psychosocial support to vulnerable prone to COVID-19 (European Commission and Member States)
- Provision of specific online trainings to frontline staff working with vulnerable groups (ECDC)

These align with several of the recommendations we proposed for the European Commission in our recent position statement [Obesity and Covid-19 exit strategies and towards a "New Normal" for resilient health systems](#). Amongst the recommendations in this document, we called for the EU4Health Programme Strand 1 to:

- Formally include people with obesity (PwO) as a high-risk group for COVID-19 and, where appropriate, identify PwO within the "shielded category" of vulnerable people.
- Prioritise PwO for COVID-19 PCR and antibodies testing in line with emerging scientific evidence within the ECDC and other EU Agency prioritisation guidelines.
- Include guidance for all types of health professionals to access education on how to treat obesity patients with COVID-19 and specifically when faced with post COVID-19 syndrome and specific psychological and dietary needs.

However, we outlined a number of other important recommendations which should also be considered for effective obesity care, such as ensuring that healthcare delivery sites are equipped to accommodate the physical and mental health needs of people with severe obesity from beds to scanning equipment, hospital garments (including appropriate PPE), diagnostic equipment, exercise therapy equipment, psychological support and dietary needs.

It is also critical that procedures are put in place so that people with obesity are able to continue to access treatment, care and support for their condition in the event of future outbreaks. Read all of our recommendations [here](#).

Obesity is a chronic relapsing disease (not a “lifestyle choice”) that deserves greater recognition and support. We hope that the measures in the new plan can be coordinated and implemented effectively across Europe, and OPEN-EU is ready and willing to work in partnership with the EU Commission, local governments and healthcare authorities to support this.

About OPEN - Obesity Policy Engagement Network (www.obesityopen.org)

Originally founded in 2018, OPEN is a global initiative focussed on ensuring policies support and enable access to holistic obesity care to ensure sustainable health outcomes for people living with obesity. A key element of OPEN is the acknowledgment that sustainable progress cannot be made by one stakeholder or one sector acting alone. As such, OPEN welcomes a wide range of stakeholders willing to make a difference:

- Patient representatives
- Policy makers at all levels
- Payers
- Employers
- Health care and public health professionals
- Research and innovation communities
- Economic actors from all sectors who can impact the health outcomes of people living with obesity

OPEN-EU acts as a collaborative policy coalition, which seeks to ensure that all relevant European institutional strategies and policies integrate measures that effectively help support people living with obesity at EU, national and Regional levels and that the treatment of obesity as a gateway disease to type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and over 230 other complications of obesity

OPEN has identified four key pillars of action which are common across world regions:

1. **Awareness** of obesity as a chronic, relapsing disease
2. **Education** on obesity for health professionals, people living with obesity and all other actors who can have an impact on outcomes
3. Sufficient **resources** to sustainably achieve better outcomes for people living with obesity and hence stem the epidemic
4. Establishment of and access to **multidisciplinary centres of excellence and care**

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