



## United Action for Allergy and Asthma “A political call to action in Europe”

### EVENT REPORT

On April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017, the European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma, in collaboration with the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) and the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Association (EFA), launched the **Political Call to Action ‘United Action for Allergy and Asthma’** during a policy symposium in the European Parliament.

Targeted at EU and national policymakers, the political [Call to Action in Europe](#) presents policy recommendations to EU Member States, the European Commission, the European Parliament and patients/civil society stakeholders, with the overarching objective to unite all strategic parties in Europe to address allergy and asthma through a collaborative and holistic approach, supporting patients' rights.

In particular, it aims to bring about positive policy changes regarding:

- Public health – implementing European strategies and programmes across Member States
- Funding for research – advancing our understanding of allergy and asthma
- Prevention and early diagnosis – achieving early detection for timely and effective treatment
- Root cause analysis of diseases – addressing underlying triggers such as air quality, food allergens, chemicals
- Personalised medicine - working towards pioneering individualised treatment
- Economic benefit – reducing direct and indirect costs on health systems and society

The launch event of the Call to Action was co-hosted by Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Sirpa Pietikäinen (Finland, EPP; Co-Chair of the Interest Group); Nathalie Griesbeck (France, ALDE; member of the Interest Group) and Karin Kadenbach (Austria, S&D; member of the Interest Group) and marked the start of a dedicated pan-European campaign to drive action on allergy and asthma.

The Call to Action is open to EU and national policy-makers, NGOs, and citizens for endorsement until September 30<sup>th</sup> 2017 at [www.callallergyasthma.eu](http://www.callallergyasthma.eu).



As Co-Chair of the Interest Group, **MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen**, welcomed all participants to the launch event of the Call to Action and underlined the importance of fostering strong multi-stakeholder collaborations amongst policymakers, doctors and patients to successfully address allergy and asthma in Europe and further turn policy asks into actions. She reiterated her strong support to the EP Interest Group and praised its success in raising awareness of allergy and asthma at policy level. She encouraged to focus on prevention and on addressing underlying triggers of allergy and asthma such as air quality. Policymakers have the duty to promote patients' rights and improve the quality of life of allergy and asthma patients through effective policies addressing their unmet needs, she emphasized. She concluded that staying united was key to achieve the common goals of the campaign.

**Prof. Antonella Muraro**, EAACI President, highlighted the importance of the Call to Action as a step forward towards improved policies addressing asthma and allergy, and its timely launch, as change is hugely needed considering that the prevalence of the conditions is dramatically rising in Europe.

Discussing EAACI's work in the field, she placed emphasis on allergy prevention, and the need for greater research. Without further knowledge on the roots causes of the disease, healthcare professionals cannot provide optimal treatment and care to patients. Prof. Muraro also stressed the value of funding regular training programmes for young doctors specialized in allergy and asthma. Universities should be able to lead more research programmes and public institutions should incentivize funds for education. The role of the European Parliament and the Commission in this regard is essential, added Prof. Muraro.

With the Call to Action, the co-initiators are showing their unity and determination to address the situation, she pointed, while encouraging each stakeholder to support and play its role in delivering better outcomes for patients as well as for our European economies and societies.

**Ms Mikaela Odemyr**, EFA President, presented the allergy and asthma patients' perspective underlining that high health standards require public policies that actively support health – in terms of public health services, prevention, research, personalised medicine, and treatments. She stressed that all EU citizens are entitled to access the highest health standards possible, in particular vulnerable people and that policies should be designed to protect children, the elderly, and make sure that people with chronic diseases live uncompromised lives. She noted that EFA is fully engaged in promoting a holistic approach among policy makers and working to drive policy changes to improve indoor air standards, to help prevent chronic respiratory diseases and guarantee patients and citizens' safety in all indoor environments like workplace and houses. She called upon decision makers and civil society to endorse and disseminate the Call to Action



to raise awareness, drive prevention, and improve disease management and invited everyone to engage with policy makers and national governments to actively contribute to this cross-party dialogue.

**Prof Jousilahti**, Research Professor at the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland, presented examples of good practice at national level in managing allergy and asthma, building on the Finnish allergy programme which is considered a reference for success in Europe. He presented an overview of the situation in Europe, showing the alarming increase in the prevalence of allergy and asthma, specifically allergies are increasing among young people and in urban areas. On the impact of the Finnish interventions to tackle the allergy epidemic, he pointed that over the last ten years, the positive effects of focusing on environmental matters in relation to the prevention of asthma were very much observable. Started in 2008, the Finnish allergy programme will continue until 2018, and the outcome so far is quite clear: while there has been an increase in the uptake of allergen Immunotherapy, serious allergies and hospitalisation admissions have decreased. These trends have come along with a general drop in related healthcare costs. He also highlighted the importance of healthy diets, good air quality and disease-prevention measures in general including primary prevention and education. "Diet is very important and so is improving air quality. We should adopt a new attitude", he said.

**Dr Schreck**, Head of the Health Programme and Chronic Disease Unit at the Directorate General for Health at the European Commission, welcomed a platform composed of policy makers, doctors, and patients: "being here altogether is already a big achievement because allergies and asthma can only be addressed through collaborative efforts", he stated.

He underlined the European Commission's work to facilitate the exchange and transfer of best practices, and the establishment of new approaches and new guidelines. He highlighted the need to monitor implementation at national level, where the real gap is. He further presented the CHRODIS platform where stakeholders can share best practices, which are evaluated by the European Commission and if positively assessed, are presented to Member States in the Steering group on Promotion and Prevention. He invited civil society stakeholders to participate actively in the Platform to this aim.

**MEP Karin Kadenbach** further discussed the European Parliament's perspective. She outlined that allergies are a real and major problem for patients, national health systems, the workforce and also for the future of the EU. As member of the Committee of Inquiry into Emission Measurements in the Automotive Sector (EMIS Committee), she referred to the 'dieselgate' dossier and underlined that the Committee looked more into the internal market issues including cheating consumers, than to how Europeans' health have been affected by increased pollutants emissions. She called for a better implementation of the rule of law as



legislation is “not only something on paper, but something that has to be enforced and implemented”. Therefore, provisions in regulatory texts have to be effectively applied to drive concrete change.

Overall, the discussions at the event underlined the need to apply existing knowledge on allergy and asthma, while fostering research on unmet needs and cooperation between the member states in terms of exchanging good practices. One of the messages that came up from the interaction between speakers and participants was that the time for action is now, as concluded MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen after thanking the audience for their participation: “Change is possible, it needs to happen now, let’s unite to drive positive change together”.