

Improving Paediatric Health Across Europe

The European Union is home to over 106 million children¹ who make up the future of every European nation. This paper, by the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) and its patient and parent association partners, identifies some of the key issues facing paediatric care and outlines the key steps that policy makers can proactively take to deliver better lifelong health across the continent.

The Priority Issues Facing Paediatric Care Across Europe

Paediatric care in a paediatric setting:

Across Europe, children are not always cared for in paediatric units - some are treated in adult hospitals and by adult doctors. **All children should be seen by a paediatric specialist in a paediatric setting.**

The importance of effective transitional care:

Transferring from paediatric to adult care is a critical time and, if not done properly, impacts education, leads to mental health issues and poor management of disease. All European countries should focus on improving transitional care arrangements.

Earlier diagnosis and treatment for a better quality of life:

Earlier diagnosis of chronic conditions leads to better growth and development, improved disease management, longer life expectancy, improved quality of life and lower healthcare costs in adult life. **Diagnosing chronic conditions earlier in childhood should be a political priority.**

Three Steps For MEPs

- 1 Raising awareness of early-years is critical to lifelong health:** MEPs can help champion the need for better child health and shine a spotlight on the inequalities and disparities within Europe. For example the lack of recognition of paediatric sub-specialties and the lack of paediatric research.
- 2 A new EU health policy focused on healthier children:** MEPs can hold the Commission to account to ensure that the new strategic plan for health fully recognises the importance of early years in delivering a healthier continent and improving childhood diagnosis, treatment and care.
- 3 Advocating for the voice of children:** MEPs can work closely with European and national paediatric medical societies and patient and parent organisations to ensure that children's voices are represented in all of the relevant decision-making and advisory bodies of the European Union.

The European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) is a multi-professional organisation whose aim is to promote the health of children with gastrointestinal, liver and nutritional diseases, through knowledge creation, dissemination of science based information, promotion of best practice in the delivery of care and the provision of high quality education in Europe and beyond.

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Gastroenterology (GI):

All conditions associated with the stomach and intestines, including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis (inflammatory bowel diseases or IBD), coeliac disease and gastroesophageal reflux disease, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and common complaints such as dyspepsia, acute gastroenteritis and constipation.

Whilst almost all children will suffer a common GI complaint, approximately 1 in 100 will be diagnosed with coeliac disease, up to 20% of cases of IBD are thought to develop in childhood and between 22-35% of adolescents suffer IBS³.

Hepatology:

All conditions affecting the liver, including autoimmune liver diseases, chronic biliary disorders, metabolic disease, viral hepatitis and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

Paediatric liver disease is increasing in prevalence and is now thought to affect up to one in ten children in Europe⁴.

Nutrition:

Obesity, malnutrition, clinical nutrition, food allergy, food sensitivity, autoimmune conditions and intestinal failure are all major focuses of nutrition, as well as the wider importance of a balanced diet.

1 in 3 of Europe's school age children are estimated to be overweight⁵ and 9% of children under 5 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have stunted growth due to malnutrition⁶.

Working Together To Improve Children's Health Across Europe

ESPGHAN is committed to working with patient and parent organisations to ensure that clinicians and the patients they help are speaking with one voice when it comes to advocating for better outcomes for the continent's children. ESPGHAN is proud to work with the following organisations:



**European Foundation
for the Care of Newborn
Infants (EFCNI)**
efcni.org



**Association of European
Coeliac Societies (AOECS)**
aoecs.org



**Children's Liver Disease
Foundation (CLDF)**
childliverdisease.org



**European Federation of
Crohn's and Ulcerative Colitis
Associations (EFCCA)**
efcca.org

MEP Digestive Health Group: The European Parliament Interest Group on Digestive Health brings together interested MEPs and the scientific community to ensure that continually improving digestive health becomes and remains an integral part of the EU health and research agenda. ESPGHAN encourage MEPs to join the group, which can be done via ueg.eu/public-affairs (United European Gastroenterology provides a secretariat service to the Group).

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