

Press release by the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR)

EULAR:

Investment beyond Horizon 2020 ‘key to EU’s future health’

Brussels, Belgium, 17th October 2017 – EULAR has called on the European Commission to maintain the EU’s position as global leader in health research. This includes continuing investment in research and developing a forward-looking agenda beyond the current research framework programme, Horizon 2020. Continued research will improve the lives of over 120 million citizens suffering from chronic diseases, including rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. An agenda for a new research programme will help the introduction of targeted and structured healthcare programmes, which in turn can lead to earlier diagnosis and access to care, thereby enabling higher workforce participation among those affected.

The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) sees continued investment in collaborative and EU-funded health research as the cornerstone of member state societal health and economic strength. Under Horizon 2020, over 7 billion Euros is estimated to be invested into health research. The Global Burden of Disease study¹ showed that rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) are the primary cause of disability in Europe and estimates that the costs of these diseases is as high as 2 percent of national GDP every year in European countries. RMDs significantly contribute to absenteeism in countries across Europe, accounting for the biggest share of working days lost.

Research and innovation has a key role to play in order to lift this substantial burden, which requires the strong support from policy-makers at EU and national level. To consider possible approaches, members of the EULAR network and representatives of the European Parliament discussed the next framework programme at the EULAR conference, ‘The future of health research and innovation after Horizon 2020. Do we need a new novel approach?’ held today in Brussels.

Professor Johannes W. J. Bijlsma, EULAR President, says, *“EULAR encourages the EU to build on the successful path of Horizon 2020 and increase investment in research and innovation. This has the potential to transform the lives of over 120 million people with RMDs and other chronic diseases. Evidence-based policy at EU level needs to reflect the substantial burden of diseases. We therefore call on the EU to set itself the challenge of strengthening its role as global leader in health research and providing access to treatment – this is the key to the European Union’s future health, both societally and economically.”*

Takis Hadjigeorgiou, Member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Interest Group on RMDs states: *“EU citizens expect the EU and member states not to look towards*

¹ Global Burden of Disease study, The Lancet: www.thelancet.com/gbd

decreasing funding for research and innovation in health, but act in their interest to ensure the best possible access to innovative treatments that are urgently required across the EU. The European Parliament will stand up for the interest of people with RMDs and other chronic diseases to maintain a strong role for the EU in research and innovation in health.”

Discussion regarding possible ‘re-balancing’ of the next framework programme towards basic research is a focus area of the conference: Experts from the area of rheumatology are using the opportunity to advocate the need for higher levels of targeted research calls in order to address the problem of programme oversubscription, as well as more funding for large and mid-size research consortia and a better reflection of the burden of diseases when it comes to allocating funds.

Representatives of the patients’ and health professionals’ communities within EULAR are likewise presenting clear evidence regarding the need to involve and engage these key groups in the development of research priorities and in the research process itself. Without their strong and continued engagement, policy aiming at improving health and well-being across Europe is at risk of failure.

In recent decades, the EU has developed into a leading region for research and innovation in health, including RMDs. Prof. Colm O’Morain, President of the Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe pointed out that *“the EU research framework programme Horizon 2020 has proven to be a key facilitator. It is however clear that substantial political commitment and increased funding are required to transform Europe’s healthcare systems in order to offer tailored and better-managed care approaches, as well as to ensure patient access to best-in-class treatment.”*²

Rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases are a wide group of diseases that commonly affect the joints, but also the muscles, as well as other tissues and internal organs. There are more than 200 different RMDs, affecting children and adults. Causes include the immune system, inflammation, infections or gradual deterioration of joints, muscle and bones. Many RMDs are long-term and worsen with time, typically painful and impede function. In severe cases, RMDs can result in significant disability with major impact on quality of life and life expectancy.

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About EULAR

The European League against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the European umbrella organisation representing scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with RMDs. EULAR aims to reduce the burden of RMDs on individuals and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of RMDs.

To this end, EULAR fosters excellence in education and research in the field of rheumatology. It promotes the translation of research advances into daily care and fights for the recognition of the needs of people with RMDs by the EU institutions through advocacy action.

² European Commission, Horizon 2020: www.ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/

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