



European Network  
for Workplace Health Promotion

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Brussels, 23 October 2013

Press release  
Workplace Health Practices for Employees with Chronic Illness  
European Conference on Promoting Workplace Health  
Brussels Declaration

**The burden of chronic diseases**

Chronic diseases pose a major challenge to people's health in Europe and worldwide. They are the leading cause of mortality and morbidity in Europe, and have a major impact on the expectancy of life lived in good health. In addition, there is evidence of the impact of chronic diseases on the labour market, showing that chronic illness affects earnings, workforce participation, job turnover and disability.

A 2010 OECD study<sup>1</sup> concluded that: *“Too many workers leave the labour market permanently due to health problems or disability, and too few people with reduced work capacity manage to remain in employment... Economic and labour market changes are increasingly proving an obstacle for people with health problems to return to work or stay in their job.”*

Because of the predicted labour market shortages and the high percentage of workers suffering from health problems and chronic illnesses, it is important to increase sustainable employability in order to optimally use the potential of all employees. Strategies aimed at increasing sustainable employability should stress the potential of workers with chronic illnesses and focus, not only on their current employability, but also on prolonged employability.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers”, 2010. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/health/mental\\_health/eu\\_compass/reports\\_studies/disability\\_synthesis\\_2010\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/mental_health/eu_compass/reports_studies/disability_synthesis_2010_en.pdf)  
[reports\\_studies/disability\\_synthesis\\_2010\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/mental_health/eu_compass/reports_studies/disability_synthesis_2010_en.pdf)



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## The PH Work campaign

The Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (COM(2010)2020)<sup>2</sup> sets the target of “achieving a 75% employment rate for 20-64 year olds throughout the EU”. However, 23.5% of the working population in the 27 European member countries reported to suffer from a chronic illness and 19% stated that they have long-standing health issues.

The “Promoting Healthy Work for Employees with Chronic Illness - Public Health and Work (PH Work)” campaign, initiated by the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP), contributes to achieving the sustainable employment element of the overall strategy. Under the slogan “Work. Adapted for all. Move Europe”, it enhances the coordination, communication, and collaboration between healthcare professionals and the workplace, and puts more focus on work-related issues (including adaptation of the workplace, reorganisation of tasks, matching jobs to abilities, supportive management).

The campaign (2011-2013) has been designed to contribute to the implementation of effective workplace health practices, by stimulating activities and policies in European companies to retain and encourage return-to-work of chronically ill employees, and to prevent employees of moving into disability or early retirement.

In the first phase of the PH Work project, data on existing sustainable work strategies, policies and good practices with regard to workers with chronic conditions were collected in several European countries. 34 models of good practice have been selected in 17 countries. That information constructed the basis for a set of guidelines for comprehensive Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) strategies and interventions on the retention/return-to-work of chronically ill workers. The second phase of the PH Work project consisted of a campaign to disseminate these guidelines and further recommendations across Europe - in order to enhance the sustainable employability of employees with a chronic condition, so they can remain a valuable part of the workforce.

## European conference on promoting workplace health

A European conference (Brussels, 22-23 October) on “Workplace Health Practices for Employees with Chronic Illness” concluded the Europe-wide campaign. Both conference and campaign are co-funded by the Health Programme of the European Commission. The PH Work closing conference was organized by the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion and Prevent-Foundation, in collaboration with the Belgian National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (INAMI-RIZIV).

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<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission COM (2010) 2020 final, Europe 2020: “A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth 2010”. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>



## Brussels Declaration

The members of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion signed the Brussels Declaration, including 10 recommendations at EU and national policy level:

- Focus on the prevention of chronic diseases at the workplace.
- Detect chronic diseases at an early stage.
- The paradigm from reduced performance to retaining current and future working ability.
- Focus on the abilities and resources of the individual and not only on limitations or restrictions.
- Address discrimination against people with chronic diseases.
- Raise the importance and priority of return-to-work (RTW) on the policy agenda.
- Increase the opportunities for employment of persons with chronic illness.
- Work must reward - work must include a positive cost-benefit ratio.
- Close and systematic cooperation of all relevant players and stakeholders.
- Fill the gaps in existing knowledge, and extend evidence and experience-based interventions.

Under the PH Work project, good practices have been collected of companies who - within their health promotion activities - pay special attention to workers with chronic conditions and their employability. A number of factors which stimulate the success of a strategy or intervention have been identified:

- Integral approach (embedding prevention, job retention and return-to-work strategies in the overall strategy of the company).
- Focus on capacities / resources instead of on medical diagnoses or limitations / deficiencies of the employee.
- Start and promote the positive principle (can do approach).
- Create and organize an activating role for employees involved.
- Be aware of taboos and prejudices (against employees with a chronic illness).
- Coordination and individual case-management.
- Participation in general health initiatives has a positive effect on companies' corporate culture, inclusive company.
- Look for a WIN-WIN approach, for example work together with other initiatives and policies in society as a whole.

The Brussels Declaration and the conclusion slides of the conference are available on: [www.workadaptedforall.eu](http://www.workadaptedforall.eu) The background documents and the practical guidelines for employers can also be downloaded from that site.

The good practices overview and analysis are available on the website of ENWHP [www.enwhp.org/enwhp-initiatives/9th-initiative-ph-work/models-of-good-practice.html](http://www.enwhp.org/enwhp-initiatives/9th-initiative-ph-work/models-of-good-practice.html)



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Sources:

- The PH Work campaign site:  
<http://www.enwhp.org/enwhp-initiatives/9th-initiative-ph-work.html>
- The conference website:  
<http://www.workadaptedforall.eu/>

More information can be obtained from the ENWHP Secretariat:

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#### About the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP)

ENWHP is an informal network of national occupational health and safety institutes, public health, health promotion and statutory social insurance institutions, aiming to improve workplace health and well-being, and to reduce the impact of work-related ill health on the European workforce.

[www.enwhp.org](http://www.enwhp.org)

#### About Prevent-Foundation

Prevent-Foundation develops and disseminates knowledge on sustainable work. On the one hand, it looks at improving working conditions in a healthy, innovative and productive economy. On the other, it is directed at improving the employability of employees in a changing labour market.

[www.prevent.be](http://www.prevent.be)



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