

Joining Forces in Health Promotion to Tackle the Burden of Chronic Diseases in Europe

Opening Speech by Jadvyga Zinkevièiûtë, Vice Minister of Health, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all gathered today in this important event. It is a big pleasure, that it takes place in Lithuania – the centre of Europe. So, I would like to congratulate you in my native Lithuanian language. I have no doubt that you will understand me. It is the language that was spoken by the greatest public health Guru of our nation – Vydūnas. He said that you need to learn to stay healthy. You must lead a healthy lifestyle, not fight illnesses, but strive to avoid them altogether. Moreover, I am convinced that our wonderful country, its great people and poetic beauty of Lithuanian language is the best, most natural source of health. I hope you all will agree with me.

I would like to sincerely thank all the organizers and attendees of the conference, as well as all our partners. It is a huge responsibility for us to create a healthy Europe together. I am confident that our joint actions will lead to a better health and quality of life for the people of our countries and future generations.

The modern world is full of challenges. Chronic non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer and mental health problems affect 8 out of 10 Europeans aged over 65. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of health care resources across the European Union are dedicated to the treatment of chronic diseases.

The issue of chronic non-communicable diseases is relevant in Lithuania as well. There is a lot to be done, as the mortality rates of our citizens from cardiovascular diseases are among the highest in the European Union. It is thereby really important that this Joint Action CHRODIS Conference, devoted to the reduction of chronic non-infectious diseases in Europe is held here, in Lithuania.

It is paramount to unite our efforts. We work together, exchange good practices and disseminate experience. We cooperate at all levels – local, regional, national and international. We focus primarily on health promotion, primary prevention, disease control as well as patients with more than one chronic non-communicable disease. I believe in our joint victory, because there are already many effective ways to prevent diseases and control them. An important role here is played by communication, public information and the mass

media, who shape the right approach: "It is cool to be healthy!" We are witnesses of constant, substantial and obvious progress. We have a truly progressive potential of professionals, enthusiasts, scientific and practical knowledge.

We have a shared responsibility. Our actions with regard to chronic diseases and healthy aging at all stages of life is currently the largest action plan, funded by the European Commission. Undoubtedly, we are a force: more than 60 associated and cooperating partners from 26 Member States. We are a strong team, consisting of different organizations, national Ministries, regional health authorities, research institutions and the entire Europe. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the European Commission, the World Health Organization, and all of you for significant and extremely warm cooperation.

I am proud that these days together we will take another firm step in the direction of a healthier and happier Europe. I wish you all great health, optimism, meaningful discussions and productive solutions! After the conference, please do not forget to mingle the cozy streets of old Vilnius and get a feel for how the heart of Lithuania beats. The heart that also wants to be healthy very much! Thank you for your attention.