

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND FITNESS:
CHALLENGES AND NEW PERSPECTIVES**



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Keynote Presentation

Physical Activity Promotion in the Context of Overall Health Policy

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Great improvements in the fight against infectious diseases and improvements in living conditions have led to a situation where non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become a great concern for many countries and their health systems. The World Health Organisation defines four big groups of NCDs (cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes type 2 and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases), three more groups could also be included: mental health disorders, cognitive disorders and degenerative diseases of the musculoskeletal system. In some countries, these diseases are already responsible for more than 50% of health costs. In view of limited resources in the health system, prevention of NCDs becomes a priority and health behaviour inducing physical activity behaviour has a key role in this respect.

The benefits of a physically active lifestyle on an individual's health have been clear for quite some time, and recent research has focussed on the effectiveness of interventions to reach population groups and to improve their physical activity behaviour. The International Society for Physical Activity and Health ISPAH and its advocacy council GAPA have defined 7 "best investments" for the promotion of physical activity at the population level: schools, transport, urban planning, the health system, public education, integrated community-wide programmes and sport for all. In Vilnius in 2015, WHO has agreed on a Physical activity strategy for the WHO European Region and now urges member states to develop their own strategies and activities. HEPA Europe, WHO's European network for the health-enhancing physical activity, facilitates the exchange between experts in the field and provides support for the development of strategies and activities. Physical activity also has many other benefits in addition to NCD-prevention, and so has the potential to reach further segments of the population and to have a positive impact on health at the population level.

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