

74th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Statement by the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)

Agenda item 12 - Harnessing innovation for public health in the WHO European Region 2025–2030: preparing for a new strategy

Dear Chair,

The European Association for the Study of the Liver would like to draw attention to the importance of recognising the burden of metabolic dysfunction-associated Steatotic liver disease (MASLD), formerly non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and integrating the disease into the development of an innovative public health strategy.

MASLD is a major public health threat due to its very high prevalence and related morbidity and mortality. MASLD is the most widespread liver disease, with an estimated prevalence of 38% of the global adult population and around 13% of children and adolescents. The disease is an increasingly important contributor to global morbidity and mortality. The burden of MASLD is expected to grow in the coming decades with wide-ranging implications for public health and health systems, yet countries are ill-prepared to face this challenge. A 2020 survey of 102 countries found that no country had a written strategy to address MASLD.

Unhealthy diets and lifestyles are the strongest risk factors for MASLD. The prevalence of obesity in the European region has risen in almost every country since 2013, resulting in an increased prevalence of MASLD. Studies show that the burden of advanced liver disease due to MASLD will more than double during 2016–2030, and the annual predicted economic burden of MASLD in Europe will be more than €35 billion in direct costs and a further €200 billion in societal costs.

Focused and dedicated interventions are urgently needed to target disease prevention, treatment, and care. With regards to the Fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW14), EASL urges the WHO and its Members States to incorporate MASLD in the development process of the GPW14. Further, increased investments in the fight against the growing burden of non-communicable diseases and its risk factors are needed.

During the 74th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, EASL has 2 specific asks:

- MASLD should be incorporated into NCD strategies and guidelines and complemented by action plans for MASLD with clear targets, benchmarks, indicators, and mechanisms to monitor progress.
- MASLD prevention, diagnosis, and care services should be included in country universal health coverage (UHC) health benefit packages.

Thank you.