



## Report from the Second Live Webinar on the 2018 Thematic Network on SIP\*

The Thematic Network on SIP held its second webinar dedicated to discussing ‘The Societal Impact of Pain – our joint challenge to tackle’ on 4 October, 2018. The successful and interactive live webinar was hosted by the [EU Health Policy Platform](#) and attended by about 50 participants.

After the introductory remarks by Ingrid Keller, Policy Coordinator - Health Programme and Chronic Diseases Unit, DG SANTE, European Commission; Vittoria Carraro, External Relations Manager - European Pain Federation (EFIC) and Anca Pop, Project Support - Pain Alliance Europe (PAE) presented the fourth draft version of the Framing Paper on Societal Impact of Pain focusing on health indicators, employment, research, education and the Joint Statement putting forward the key recommendations to policy-makers and stakeholders.

In their presentation EFIC and PAE highlighted the dimension of pain in Europe. Out of 740 million people, most will experience an episode of severe pain at some point in their lives, and for 20% that pain is chronic – episodic, persistent, or variable. Indeed, this causes a great impact on society: such as early retirement and more than 500 million sick days per year in Europe. Musculoskeletal pain causes almost 50% of all absences from work lasting at least three days in the EU and 60% of permanent work absence. In total this costs the EU €240 billion each year.

To tackle this pan-European challenge SIP is developing a Framing Paper with policy recommendations. This process is now nearly concluded: after an extensive data gathering process from the SIP stakeholders, desk research and an open call for contribution, civil society groups dealing with pain gave their input in a working group. This was followed by the drafting of the Framing Paper taking into consideration the diverse ideas and feedback. The first draft was then discussed in the first webinar, and consequently amended to reflect input and recommendations. The Framing Paper is structured along the four pillars of health indicators, employment, research, education including individual advocacy maps leading to policy recommendations on EU and member state level.

**The first pillar, health indicators**, sheds light on the existing data gap in how the societal impact of pain is measured and monitored across the EU. The following is recommended:

- The European Commission and the OECD should include pain as a key indicator in their Health at a Glance report.
- The European Commission should repeat and broaden their 2006 Health Eurobarometer, including questions on musculoskeletal pain.
- Member states should adopt the updated pain disease classification ICD-11, civil society and Health Care Professionals (HCPs) should contribute to the education on the uptake of the new codification.



**The second pillar, employment**, highlights that chronic pain is the number one reason for workplace absenteeism and disability in the EU. Consequently, recommendations emphasize:

- The European Commission and Member States should work together to promote policies that reflect the link between pain and employment.
- The European Commission should support projects like CHRODIS-Plus for the inclusion of pain into all training tools.
- The European Commission and Member states should consider the recommendations from the PATHWAYS project when reviewing current strategies on chronic disease and employment policies.

**The third pillar, focuses on research** showing that whilst mechanisms of pain as a biopsychosocial phenomenon are not fully understood at the molecular and cellular level, they are even less understood at a behavioural and socio-economic level. The following recommendations focus on rectifying this:

- The European Commission should propose further investment in research on the societal impact of pain, Member States and EP support the resource allocation in the legislative process.
- The European Commission should support the development of pain centres of excellence across the EU and encourage a network for these centres.
- The European Commission should include pain as a topic for its mission-oriented research.

**The fourth and final pillar, focuses on education** and the issue that pain medicine is not taught as a dedicated subject in most European academic systems, and not widely known in the broader community. Recommendations on this are concentrated on including education on pain in the wider scheme of medical education and raising awareness:

- The European Commission should support national governments in the coordination and sharing of best practice in pain education.
- The European Commission and Parliament as well as Member States should support awareness raising activities, educating a wide range of stakeholders about pain management.
- Member States should promote wider access to pain education within the formal education of healthcare professionals (HCPs) and promote education of pain self-management and health literacy.

The presentation was followed by an engaging discussion between the presenters and the audience to provide feedback to improve the recommendations.

- The European Commission strongly encouraged all participants to put forward best practice examples to the relevant Commission portal, to give member states the opportunity to learn from each other and EU policy making to work with these best practice examples.



- Participants encouraged to extend their education efforts beyond health care professionals to wider society, to include risk factors such as health and lifestyle behaviour and to start this education at an early age.
- On the issue of pain management options, participants highlighted the importance of choice in appropriate pain medication, the availability of information to patients and the option to choose necessary medication plans. In this context, the inclusion of a 'patient for patient toolkit' in the paper was emphasized.
- Discussing employment as a focus area for the framing paper, participants highlighted the need for more flexible work environments to not only encourage reintegration but to prevent the development of chronic pain in the first place. Finland was highlighted as a country with particularly encouraging work flexible work options such as partial sick leave, as well as the UK which legally requires employers to support chronically sick workers in the work environment. In this context, the necessity of approaching health and mental health in a more inclusive multi-sectoral approach was stressed, as the assumption that pain needs time to heal does not apply to workers with chronic pain: These patients need work as part of their re-integration into society and to participate in a 'normal life'.
- Participants generally agreed that involving patients in all stages of health policy is essential starting from steering research to policy making to educating society and health care professionals on pain. This process has already started, and patients are increasingly involved in projects, as many patient organisations, both at national and EU-level, are working on making patients heard and understood through, for example, participation in patient advisory boards.

Following the feedback received, SIP will further develop the Framing Paper and the Joint Statement encouraging potential further endorsers to join this process. The paper will be validated at the SIP Annual Steering Committee on 25 October where discussions will also focus on how to leverage the statement beyond the thematic network. The final version of these documents will be officially presented at the EU Health Policy Platform annual meeting on 12 November 2018 in Brussels.

The presentation from the second webinar is available [here](#) and can be downloaded.

The webinar can be watched again [here](#).

*\* Please note that the aim of these notes is to capture the general spirit of the discussion. For further details, please refer to the webinar.*



### **About SIP**

The "Societal Impact of Pain" (SIP) is an international platform created in 2009 as a joint initiative of European Pain Federation EFIC® and the pharmaceutical Grünenthal GmbH. Co-operation partners are Pain Alliance Europe and Active Citizenship Network.