

Joint Response to the Swedish National Cardiovascular (CVD) Action Plan

24 November 2025

To the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs – Socialdepartementet

The ambition to strengthen cardiovascular health in Sweden is very welcome. However, it is striking that the Swedish national **cardiovascular (CVD) action plan** is presented exclusively as a programme for “*heart health*” – revising heart guidelines and explicitly drawing on recommendations from the World Heart Federation – while **stroke is not mentioned once**.

From a citizen, scientific and policy perspective, equating CVD with heart disease alone is a serious step backwards. It takes us back almost 30 years, before stroke was recognised at WHO, EU and governmental level as a major pillar of CVD diseases.

In 2025, this is no longer acceptable: stroke constitutes a major part of CVD. Overlooking stroke in prevention, service planning, rehabilitation and research funding is not constructive or compatible with contemporary evidence. It also reinforces an unhelpful perception of “competition” in which heart organisations speak *for* – instead of *with* – the stroke community.

Stroke remains one of the leading causes of death, long-term disability and dementia in Europe. It is also a major driver of caregiver burden and social costs. Europe already has a robust, evidence-based policy framework in the **Stroke Action Plan for Europe (SAP-E)**, a comprehensive programme fully aligned with **UN SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being** and with the broader WHO and EU non-communicable disease agenda. SAP-E makes clear that modern cardiovascular policy must address heart and brain together, across prevention, acute care, rehabilitation and life after stroke.

The Swedish data themselves illustrate why stroke cannot be invisible in the national CVD strategy. According to the Socialstyrelsen’s most recent statistics¹², around **26,000 new strokes** were registered in Sweden in 2024, with approximately **5,200 deaths** where stroke was the underlying cause. In comparison, in 2023 there were about **22,200 acute myocardial infarctions** and roughly **4,400 deaths** from heart attack. In other words, stroke already affects **more people each year than acute heart attacks** in Sweden, despite very welcome declines in incidence and mortality of both conditions over the past two decades. To speak of

¹ <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/om-socialstyrelsen/pressrum/press/farre-drabbas-och-dor-av-stroke/>

² <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/om-socialstyrelsen/pressrum/press/omkring-tusen-farre-hjartinfarkter-i-sverige-2023/>

CVD while omitting the very condition that generates the largest number of events is difficult to justify in public health terms.

The Swedish CVH action plan is a crucial and important opportunity. By explicitly integrating stroke into the CVD action plan, Sweden will align with the SAP-E and the forthcoming EU Cardiovascular Health Plan and will help position Europe as a global leader in the fight against stroke. The European stroke community would strongly welcome constructive engagement with the Ministry of Health and Minister Elisabet Lann so that stroke is a visible and fully integrated part of this strategy – ensuring that cardiovascular health carries the true meaning of **both heart and brain health**.

For those wishing to explore this further, additional information and policy resources are available on the websites of the **Stroke Action Plan for Europe (SAP-E)**, the **World Stroke Organization (WSO)** and the **Stroke Alliance for Europe (SAFE)**:

- Stroke Action Plan for Europe: <https://actionplan.eso-stroke.org/>
- Stroke Alliance for Europe: <https://www.safestroke.eu/>
- World Stroke Organization: <https://www.world-stroke.org/>

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