

## 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

### European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) – Statement on agenda item 11 – Fourteenth General Programme of Work (2025-2028)

Dear Chair,

The European Association for the Study of the Liver welcomes the Fourteenth General Programme of Work 2025-2028 (GPW14) consultation document and would like to draw attention to the importance of recognising the burden of Metabolic dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD), formerly called non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and integrating the disease into the development of the GPW14.

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.

MASLD is strongly related to obesity and type-2 diabetes, with a prevalence of over 50% among adults and children with obesity or diabetes. The disease is an increasingly important contributor to global morbidity and mortality, including cirrhosis and the need for liver transplant, liver cancer, and cardiovascular disease. 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.

Unhealthy diets and a sedentary lifestyle are the strongest risk factors for MASLD. Therefore, MASLD is a preventable and treatable disease by lifestyle modification. 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. (Lazarus JV et al., 2022)

Focused and dedicated interventions are urgently needed to target disease prevention, treatment, and care. With regards to the 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 their risk factors are needed.

During the 73<sup>rd</sup> 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.



The European Association for the Study of the Liver mission aims to be the Home of Hepatology so that all who are involved with treating liver disease can realise their full potential to cure and prevent it. The purpose of the association is to promote communication between European workers interested in the liver and its disorders. In particular, the association strives to:

- *Promote research concerning the liver*
- *Promote education of physicians, scientists, and public awareness of liver diseases and their management*
- *Act as an advisor to European and national health authorities concerning liver diseases, provision of clinical services and the need for research funding*
- *Foster European multicentre controlled trials*
- *Facilitate scientific exchange*
- *Facilitate the participation of Young Investigators at its meetings*