

Osteoporosis and fragility fractures as a priority in chronic disease

Osteoporosis is a chronic disease that weakens bones and leaves people at risk of fractures. While a range of national and pan-European strategies have been developed with the aim of reducing the burden of chronic diseases, osteoporosis and fragility fractures are not usually prioritised.

The burden of chronic diseases in Europe is high, and will continue to grow.¹ In the European Union (EU), around 85% of deaths are due to chronic diseases, and the costs associated with managing these conditions are extremely high.^{1,2} As populations age, the burden of chronic diseases will increase,¹ leading to poorer health and greater pressure on healthcare systems.²

Osteoporosis is a very common chronic disease with serious consequences for health and wellbeing.^{3,4} An estimated 27.6 million people in the EU are living with osteoporosis, which weakens bones and leaves people at risk of fragility fractures.⁵ These fractures can lead to pain, loss of mobility and even death.^{3,4}

Osteoporosis and fragility fractures make up a large proportion of the overall burden of chronic disease. The burden of disability caused by osteoporosis is greater than both hypertensive heart disease and rheumatoid arthritis, while fragility fractures cause more combined death and disability than any type of cancer except lung cancer.⁵

In addition, osteoporosis and fragility fractures represent a significant economic burden. Fragility fractures cost EU healthcare systems a total of €37.4 billion.⁵ This is higher than for many other chronic diseases such as stroke and ischaemic heart disease, and represents 3% of countries' healthcare spending, on average.^{5,6}

While a range of European and national health strategies aim to improve prevention of chronic disease, osteoporosis is rarely prioritised.⁷ Prevention strategies have been developed at the European level, and at a national level in many countries, aiming to reduce the burden of chronic diseases.⁸⁻¹⁰ These strategies usually highlight conditions such as diabetes¹¹ and heart disease,^{12,13} while musculoskeletal conditions, including osteoporosis, are often ignored.¹³

Osteoporosis presents a serious and urgent challenge to European healthcare systems. While existing efforts to address chronic disease are commendable, policymakers must recognise the critical importance of prioritising osteoporosis and fragility fractures.



Osteoporosis isn't headline-grabbing, and because of that it gets relegated. The reality of its impact on people's lives is not recognised.



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