

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome all the participants of the Vitamin D Conference here, today.

I would like also to welcome with distinguished attention our speakers representing the scientific, medical and patient communities, as well as my colleagues from the European Parliament.

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As you have all been working on for years to inform people of the great importance Vitamin D serves in their lives, it might occur to you as a question, how does a lawyer come across a topic like this?

What is the reason for being in the company of such distinguished scientists, doctors, professors and researchers?

Well, the first reason is that I am a member of the European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee. The second is a lot more serious, since the organizers of this Conference have drawn my attention to the following problems:

- You may already know, but it was a shockingly new information for me, that at least 50% of the European population is Vitamin D deficient.
- Similarly, you may all be aware of the fact - though I had not known it before - that the so-called 'sunshine vitamin' is not only essential for bone and muscle health, but is also a key preventive factor in overall human health. As it is showed by a growing body of scientific research, vitamin D deficiency is linked to a wide range of diseases, such as osteoporosis, heart diseases, many forms of cancer, diabetes, asthma, multiple sclerosis and the list goes on.
- Finally, you may all have heard of that recent international study, the so-called 'Grant Study', according to which sufficient provision of the population with vitamin D would lower the health costs in 17 European countries by an unbelievable 187 billion euros (!) - with only 10 billion of additional costs.

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This is an important issue. In fact, anything where it is proven that at least 50% of the European population has a deficiency of, poses a clear health priority. Indeed, vitamin D is a significant opportunity for health promotion and prevention.

So I think that the link between our professions is, in both in the field of law and healthcare, that the most important thing is prevention.

If we prevent vitamin D deficiency and with it possibly diseases, we will actually prevent healthcare costs and reduce the economic burden on our public health systems.

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Today's conference with the call for action offers a unique opportunity to bring together representatives of the scientific community, the medical community, patient community and policy makers, who are all connected in their ambition to tackle vitamin D deficiency.

I am delighted to host this event here, inside the European Parliament today to raise awareness on this issue and I am looking forward to interesting contributions and discussions.