**Why Your Country Needs to Prioritise Chronic Pain Prevention**

#### **European Day on Pain Awareness 2025: ‘Preventive Healthcare for Chronic Pain’**

**The Challenge: A Widespread but Overlooked Public Health Crisis**

**Chronic pain**—defined as pain lasting longer than three months—affects **1 in 5 adults in Europe**, making it the most prevalent long-term health condition on the continent. It spans all age groups, and includes musculoskeletal pain, headache disorders, postsurgical pain, and neuropathic conditions. Its impact is deep and multidimensional: it severely limits quality of life, drives mental ill health, and contributes to premature mortality.

The **economic cost of chronic pain is estimated at €12 billion annually**, or up to **4% of GDP**, with losses stemming from healthcare expenditures, long-term sick leave, early retirement, and reduced productivity. It also reinforces **health and social inequities**: chronic pain is more common in women, older adults, and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, yet it remains largely absent from national health strategies, under-addressed in medical training, and invisible in prevention policies.

**Why Prevention Is Urgent and Possible**

Despite the magnitude of the problem, **chronic pain can be prevented**—yet this opportunity is not being seized. Prevention in this context means identifying and addressing the **modifiable risk factors** that increase the likelihood of acute pain becoming chronic and disabling. These include low physical activity, poor sleep, stress and depression, fear of pain, lack of workplace support, and limited access to timely care.

Prevention happens at two key levels:

* **Primary prevention** reduces the risk of chronic pain developing in the first place, by promoting healthy behaviours and reducing risk factors.
* **Secondary prevention** ensures early detection and timely biopsychosocial interventions for those at higher risk of pain becoming persistent or disabling.

As Europe’s population continues to age and multimorbidity rises, **proactive pain prevention must be embedded into public health, education, employment and ageing policies**. It is an investment in societal resilience, sustainability, and fairness.

**Pain Research: A Strategic and Economic Necessity**

Despite its societal impact, **pain remains one of the most underfunded areas in EU health research**. EFIC’s European Research Strategy (2024) identified critical gaps that are undermining progress:

* A lack of investment in understanding **how and why pain becomes chronic**—particularly in vulnerable groups
* Insufficient evidence on **what prevention strategies work**, for whom, and in what settings
* Few studies evaluating the **cost-effectiveness and scalability** of real-world interventions
* Weak integration of **digital innovation**, AI tools, and health data for early detection
* Limited use of **sex/gender and equity lenses** in prevention science

By increasing funding for prevention-focused pain research—e.g. **Horizon Europe** and national programmes—governments can unlock better care, reduce long-term disability, and strengthen health system sustainability. **The return on investment is clear.**

**EFIC’s Strategic Recommendations**

To reverse the growing burden of chronic pain, the **European Pain Federation EFIC** calls upon national governments to:

* Launch **public awareness campaigns** to improve understanding of pain, challenge stigma, and promote early help-seeking.
* Promote **structured movement and education programmes** in clinical, educational and workplace settings.
* Ensure **early access to biopsychosocial rehabilitation** for people at risk of chronicity.
* Establish **evidence-based care standards** to reduce ineffective or harmful treatments.
* Strengthen **primary care systems** to enable early diagnosis and coordination of care.
* Support **inclusive employment policies** that facilitate job retention and return to work.
* Invest in **prevention research**, data infrastructure, and implementation strategies.

**Call to Action**

**Chronic pain is preventable.**

**Prevention can reduce the risk, severity, and impact of chronic pain**—but only if countries act now. Chronic pain must be recognised as a core part of **preventive healthcare**, alongside other major health challenges.

With the right strategies—education, early intervention, and support—we can relieve pain before it becomes chronic and disabling.

**Policymakers, professionals, and patients: let’s work together to relieve pain.** By prioritising prevention, we build healthier, more inclusive, and more resilient societies.

**Let’s act early, together.**

 Learn more: [European Day on Pain Awareness page when available]
 Campaign hashtags: **#PainAwareness #PreventPain #TogetherToRelievePain**
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