

EASL Congress 2024: Combating Liver Disease Collectively

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Liver disease has become one of the biggest health challenges of the 21st century, affecting over 1.5 billion individuals worldwide, claiming more than 2 million lives annually—equivalent to 4% of all deaths globally—and imposing a substantial economic and societal burden on nations.

Remarkably, 90% of liver disease cases can be prevented, but this requires commitment, comprehensive solutions and collaboration. Efforts to combat liver disease should be implemented at every level: globally, by coordinating policy actions and research initiatives; regionally, by harmonising regulations and sharing best practices across borders; nationally, by developing robust healthcare policies and prevention strategies; and at the community level, by providing education, early detection, and accessible treatment options to all populations.

Today marks the launch of [EASL Congress 2024](#), the largest European liver conference, where 7,000 scientists, doctors, decision-makers, industry representatives and affected communities from 120 countries are gathering in Milan. Running from 5-8 June, the congress will feature an abundance of current scientific developments in the diverse field of hepatology. This event is where new avenues for prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and management of liver disease are exchanged and explored collectively.

“This congress is not just about sharing knowledge; it’s about forging a global alliance to tackle liver disease head-on, using the latest advancements in medical science and technology, and implementing effective policy actions,” said Prof. Aleksander Krag, Secretary General of the [European Association for the Study of the Liver \(EASL\)](#).

Liver disease in the World Health Organization non-communicable disease agenda

Towards this aim, the keynote address by Dr. Kremlin Wickramasinghe, Regional Adviser for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity at the WHO Regional Office for Europe, will discuss how to integrate liver health into the broader non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention agenda.

Steatotic liver disease affects up to a quarter of the global population, with a growing prevalence linked to increasing rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Yet, it remains neglected, missing in the 2023-2030 Implementation Roadmap for the Global Action for the Prevention and Control of NCDs. Addressing commercial determinants of health through policy actions for marketing, pricing and taxation of alcohol and unhealthy foods, especially among young people, is of vital importance. For at-risk populations like people who inject drugs, have alcohol disorders or live with obesity, stigma plays a significant role in creating barriers to early disease detection and equitable access to appropriate care as well.

Uniting for Healthy Livers, Healthy Lives

The congress will discuss the progress of the [Healthy Livers, Healthy Lives](#) Coalition, founded by the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL), the Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver (APASL), the American Association for the Study of the Liver Diseases (AASLD), and the Latin American Association for the Study of the Liver (Asociación Latinoamericana para el Estudio del Hígado; ALEH). This coalition of leading liver associations drives action across clinical, public health, and policy levels, addressing global issues with a united voice and aiming to elevate them on the political agenda of all nations and relevant organisations, like WHO.

Prof. Jeff Lazarus, Chair of the Healthy Livers, Healthy Lives Steering Committee, stated: "Our coalition exemplifies the power of international collaboration in tackling liver disease. By welcoming diverse expertise and perspectives, we can drive meaningful change and push liver health higher up on the global health agenda. Initiatives like World Liver Day—observed on 19 April—and our ongoing discussions at the WHO's World Health Assembly are pivotal in raising awareness and advocating for comprehensive prevention, care and treatment strategies worldwide."

Protecting the next generations in Europe against liver disease

Regional initiatives will also be in the spotlight. Updates will be given on the [EASL Lancet Commission 2.0](#), which aims to shift the focus from end-stage care to prevention and health promotion in Europe. The Commission underscores the importance of addressing structural drivers of liver-related mortality, particularly the fragmented landscape of alcohol policies in Europe.

Prof. Tom Hemming Karlsen, Chair of the Steering Committee said, "We are steadfast in our commitment to advance liver health for future generations, necessitating an integration of educational initiatives for emerging health professionals, the evolution of clinical pathways in progressive health-care systems, and the articulation of new public health policies. This endeavour will be encapsulated within a cohesive, equity-centred framework, designed to assess and mitigate health risks comprehensively, thereby embodying a rigorous, sustainable, and holistic approach to liver health across Europe in line with the core ethos of EASL."

Breakthroughs in liver science

At EASL Congress 2024, the emphasis on sharing new knowledge and science will be paramount. This event will showcase the most exciting scientific developments from research centres around the world, forging new pathways for treatment.

- Among the highlights is a [Phase 2 trial](#) demonstrating that fecal microbiota transplant (FMT) significantly reduces hepatic encephalopathy recurrence in patients with cirrhosis already on standard treatments, proving both safe and effective regardless of administration route or donor type.
- Another noteworthy study is a [Phase 2a trial](#) of ZED1227 in patients with MASLD and significant fibrosis. Although it did not meet the primary endpoint, it showed promising reductions in fibrosis markers for those with high disease activity.
- Additionally, the [intelligent Liver Function Testing](#) (iLFT) platform significantly improved chronic liver disease diagnosis and management over five years by performing over 26,000 tests, reducing unnecessary specialist referrals, and adapting to new guidelines.
- Interim results from the [CHANCE study](#) revealed that liver transplantation dramatically improves survival in patients with severe ACLF, underscoring the inadequacy of current organ allocation systems based on MELD scores and the urgent need for reform.
- Lastly, a [Phase 2 trial](#) of LPCN 1148 showed significant improvements in muscle mass and reductions in hepatic encephalopathy episodes in men with cirrhosis, suggesting a new therapeutic option for managing sarcopenia and enhancing patient outcomes.

Community level initiatives: “Love Your Liver” impact projects

From driving global policy initiatives to implementing local solutions, EASL Congress 2024 emphasises the importance of addressing liver disease at every level. Therefore, the congress will also focus on leaving a lasting legacy in the host city of Milan via community-focused initiatives. Launched at EASL Congress in London in 2022, and successfully continued in Vienna in 2023, EASL’s “[Love Your Liver](#)” impact projects aim to raise awareness, promote early detection, and build professional capacities in hepatology.

On 4-8 June, EASL invites the public to free liver screenings and consultations, providing invaluable insights into liver health. On June 3, the EASL team, in collaboration with local hepatologists, will visit Scuola Secondaria Mauri in Milan and offer interactive sessions, including an ultrasound demonstration, to educate young pupils about liver health. EASL has also partnered with the University of Padova and Project Third Mission to deliver dynamic liver health seminars across Italy

and reach schools in Palermo, Rome, and Padua.

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