JA PreventNCD

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Healthy living is about more than willpower

We choose what we eat, how much we move and the habits we keep. But how free are those choices, really? A new European campaign is shining a light on how the world around us shapes our health – and how small everyday changes, combined with healthier neighbourhoods and communities, can help us live healthier, longer lives.

Most of us know the basics. Move a little more. Eat well. Don't smoke. Drink less or no alcohol. Knowing what is good for us, however, does not always make it easy to do.

Our shops are full of temptations. Many of us spend much of the day sitting down. Driving can be easier than walking or cycling. Advertising, prices and availability influence what we buy, while alcohol and tobacco remain highly visible in many of the places where we spend our time.

A new European campaign wants us to start noticing those influences.

On 14 September, **The Saboteurs** launches across 25 European countries as part of the EU-funded Joint Action, JA PreventNCD. Using humour, the campaign shows how the world around us can act like a group of "saboteurs", quietly getting in the way when we try to make healthier choices.

"We like to think that our choices are simply a matter of personal decisions. But our surroundings influence us constantly, often without us even noticing. We need to make it easier for people to make healthy choices while also creating communities that support them," says Project Coordinator of JA PreventNCD, **Dr. Linda Granlund**.

Small changes really do count

The campaign focuses on four areas that have a major impact on our heart health and the risk of cancer and other non-communicable diseases: nutrition, physical activity, tobacco and alcohol.

But its message is not that everyone needs to transform their life overnight.

An extra walk. Taking the stairs more often. Adding more fruit, vegetables or whole grains to your meals. Drinking less alcohol or quitting tobacco. Small choices repeated over weeks, months and years can add up.

"We often underestimate the value of the small things we do every day. It does not have to be perfect. Small changes can become habits, and healthy habits can make a real difference over time," says Granlund.

What if our neighbourhoods helped us?

But *The Saboteurs* is not just about what each of us can do differently.

It also asks a bigger question: *What if the places where we live, work and spend our time actually made it easier to be healthy?*

Imagine neighbourhoods where walking and cycling are safe and enjoyable. Parks, playgrounds and public spaces that invite people outside. Healthy food that is easy to find and affordable. Communities where children and adults naturally have opportunities to move, meet and be active.

These environments can improve health for millions of people without asking every individual to find more willpower.

“The risk of poor health is not distributed equally. Where we live, what we can afford and the opportunities available around us all influence our health. Prevention therefore has to be about both individual actions and the conditions in which people live,” says **Prof. Knut-Inge Klepp**, Scientific Coordinator of JA PreventNCD.

Talk differently about health!

In the campaign film, an ordinary man is simply trying to get through his day while a group of saboteurs repeatedly interfere with his attempts to make healthy choices.

It is deliberately exaggerated to make us laugh – but also to make the invisible visible.

From the design of our streets and neighbourhoods to what is promoted in shops and online, our surroundings constantly influence our behaviour.

The Saboteurs aims to move health issues away from finger-pointing. The message is not that people simply need to “try harder”. Instead, we can act on both sides at the same time: make small changes in our own lives while working towards environments that make healthy living easier**.**

25 countries putting prevention in the spotlight

The Saboteurs was developed through JA PreventNCD, a major EU-funded collaboration involving 25 European countries and more than 100 partners working together to prevent cancer and other non-communicable diseases.

The ambition goes far beyond one campaign. The wider work looks at how policies, communities and living environments can give more people a better chance of enjoying good health throughout their lives.

"Health is not created only in hospitals and doctors' offices. It is created where we live our lives – at home, at school, at work and in our neighbourhoods. In the future, we should expect health to play a much bigger role in how these places are designed. The goal should be simple: make the healthy choice the easier choice," conclude Granlund and Klepp.

Short facts

JA PreventNCD - A shared European effort

The Saboteurs is a joint European campaign developed through JA PreventNCD, bringing together 25 European countries in a shared effort to prevent cancer and other non-communicable diseases and make healthy living easier and more accessible for everyone.
https://preventncd.eu/prevention

Watch *The Saboteurs* on YouTube here.

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