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## TOWARDS A NATIONAL PLAN FOR CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES, ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF DEATH IN BELGIUM

Brussels, 22 February 2023 – **Every year, cardiovascular diseases are responsible for one third of deaths (31 000 deaths a year) in Belgium and are the country's principal cause of mortality. At present almost 754 000 Belgians suffer from a cardiovascular disease. Faced with this genuine public health challenge, the Brussels University Hospital (H.U.B.), a grouping of the Erasmus Hospital, the Jules Bordet Institute and the Queen Fabiola University Children's Hospital, is proposing action to combat cardiovascular disease through a national plan for the prevention of these diseases.**

### *One third of deaths in Belgium are due to cardiovascular disease*

The leading cause of mortality in Belgium, cardiovascular diseases are responsible for one third of deaths in the country, at the rate of approximately 31 000 deaths a year. Cardiovascular diseases are a heterogeneous group of diseases affecting the heart and blood vessels. Most cardiovascular diseases are the result of a build-up of fats and cholesterol in the artery walls, known as atheromatosis. Of around 754 000 persons affected by atheromatosis in Belgium, an estimated 400 000 present an ischemic cardiac disease (angina pectoris, heart attack or sudden death). Approximately 100 000 present a cerebrovascular disease (stroke, transient ischemic attack or cognitive decline) caused by insufficient blood supply to the brain. Finally, 240 000 persons will show a peripheral arterial disease (narrowing of the arteries in the lower limbs giving rise to pain in the legs during effort or necrosis).

### *Harnessing support for a national plan*

Given the large number of Belgians affected by these diseases, prevention and treatment adapted to the risk factors for cardiovascular disease represent a major public health challenge. It is this that prompted Professor Antoine Bondue, President of the Scientific Committee of the Belgian Cardiological League, and Professor Philippe Van de Borne, President of the Working Group on Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Belgian Society of Cardiology - both cardiologists at the Erasmus Hospital - to propose a national plan for cardiovascular diseases at the information session organised at the Chamber of Representatives on 20 October last year. Like the European cancer plan launched in 2008, the cardiologists believe in prioritising resources for combatting and preventing these diseases. This to include treatment education and prevention missions as well as access and improvements to existing multidisciplinary care. Increasing awareness among the general population of the various risk factors by organising effective screening campaigns in the face of the lack of information and official data remains the principal objective of the doctors.

### *Preventing cardiovascular diseases is possible*

The probability of being affected by a cardiovascular disease increases with age, with an acceleration after the age of 50 among men and after the age of 60 among women. This is why there is a need to identify the risk factors, act accordingly (preferably before a cardiovascular disease develops) and detect any damage to the arteries at an early stage. The earlier the diagnosis the more effective the treatment. Some risks are easy to avoid, such as not smoking, maintaining a balanced diet, taking regular physical exercise and not consuming alcohol to excess. However, there are other factors over which we exercise less control, such as a tendency to high blood pressure or high cholesterol or sugar (diabetes) levels in the blood. A number of other "non-avoidable" factors are also relevant: sex (pre-menopausal women being relatively protected against

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cardiovascular disease), hormonal determinants, genetic predispositions, family antecedents, ageing or the presence of a chronic kidney disease.

As a university, cancer and paediatric hospital, the H.U.B. offers personalised care of cardiovascular diseases adapted to individual needs. To ensure effective global treatment, a multidisciplinary team of experts is available. This consists of cardiologists, endocrinologists, gastroenterologists, obesity specialists, geneticists and paediatricians. In bringing together the Erasmus Hospital, the Jules Bordet Institute and the Children's Hospital, each of them reference hospitals in their own right, the H.U.B is recognised as a centre of expertise for cardiovascular and paediatric cardiology care in Brussels.

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## ABOUT THE JULES BORDET INSTITUTE

An integrated multidisciplinary centre, the only one of its kind in Belgium, the Jules Bordet Institute is an autonomous hospital dedicated exclusively to cancerous diseases.

During the past 80 years the Jules Bordet Institute has been offering its patients diagnostic and treatment strategies at the leading edge of progress to prevent, detect and actively fight cancer. The Institute pursues three missions: care, research and teaching. The Institute's international reputation attracts leading experts in the field of cancer. Its spirit of innovation has enabled it to participate in the development and discovery of new methods of diagnosis and major treatment innovations, with the aim of translating the results into improved patient care as rapidly as possible.

In May 2028, the Jules Border Institute was officially awarded, for the second time, OECI (Organisation of European Cancer Institutes) accreditation as a "Comprehensive Cancer Center", a quality label reserved for multidisciplinary cancer care institutions that combine research and training. The Jules Bordet Institute is the only Comprehensive Cancer Centre with OECI accreditation in Belgium.

On 28 November 2021, the Jules Bordet Institute opened its new building on the ULB university campus in Anderlecht with 80,000 m<sup>2</sup> fully dedicated to leading edge cancer care, research and training, as well as a patient well-being centre. It offers 250 hospitalisation beds and 43 day hospitalisation beds.

The Jules Bordet Institute is also part of the H.U.B., the University Hospital of Brussels, which includes the Erasmus Hospital, the Jules Bordet Institute and the Queen Fabiola Children's Hospital. Thanks to new investments, this internationally renowned university hospital group is able to guarantee high quality care accessible to all combined with excellence in research and training.

[www.bordet.be](http://www.bordet.be)

## ABOUT THE ERASMUS HOSPITAL

The Erasmus Hospital is located on the Erasmus hospital-faculty campus, which includes the Faculty of Medicine (about 3500 students), the Faculty of Motor Sciences (about 1100 students) and the School of Public Health (about 600 students).

Opened in 1977 and with a capacity of 1,048 beds, the hospital receives 25,000 to 30,000 inpatients annually and has 350,000 to 400,000 consultations.

More than 4,000 members of staff, in 80 different professions, contribute on a daily basis to providing care under the sign of ambition, excellence and well-being. The Lothier Polyclinic and 2 external centres (the Traumatology and Rehabilitation Centre - CTR and the Geriatric Revalidation Centre - CRG) complete the care offer.

[www.erasme.ulb.ac.be](http://www.erasme.ulb.ac.be)

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## ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

The Queen Fabiola University Children's Hospital is the only Belgian hospital exclusively dedicated to children and adolescents. By doing everything possible for the well-being of children, our hospital contributes to their being actors of their own development and to their blossoming in society.

The hospital's mission is to

- To care for and support children, adolescents and their families through comprehensive, multidisciplinary, humanistic and excellent care.
- To provide high-level teaching and research through a continuous process of innovation and development of knowledge.
- To contribute actively to health education.

The HUDERF in figures: 183 beds, nearly 135,000 consultations, more than 36,000 emergency admissions and more than 41,000 days of hospitalisation per year. More than 3,700 operations are performed in the operating theatre each year. More than 1,000 people work there today, representing 750 FTEs (full-time equivalents), including 170 FTE doctors (52.5 post-graduate FTEs) and 440 FTE nurses and paramedics.

[www.hud erf.be](http://www.hud erf.be)

## ABOUT THE H.U.B

The Hôpital Universitaire de Bruxelles (H.U.B) is the academic hospital of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), which unites the Jules Bordet institute, the Erasme Hospital and the Queen Fabiola Children's University Hospital (HUDERF) since 2021.

As an international reference center, located in the heart of the Brussels Region, the H.U.B offers high quality general, oncological and pediatric care.

This excellent care, accessible to all, is enriched and sustained by a dual approach of scientific research and teaching for the caregivers of tomorrow.

In 2022, the H.U.B. is composed of more than 6,000 employees who share the following values: Interest of the patient, Team spirit, Commitment, Solidarity, Diversity and Inclusion, and the principle of Free enquiry.

[www.hubruxelles.be](http://www.hubruxelles.be)