

The role of B.I.R.O. in implementing the Diabetes EU Policy Recommendations

*a Policy document by the B.I.R.O. EU Project Consortium (<http://www.biro-project.eu>)
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The European Union cannot deal with diabetes effectively until dependable and comparable data on the disease, as this affects the member states, becomes available. Only then, can present policy gaps be recognized and comprehensive strategies put in place to tackle the problems caused by the disease.

The EU funded project "Best Information though Regional Outcomes" (B.I.R.O), details of which are provided below, can help make this data widely available.

The St Vincent Declaration was crucial in creating awareness of Diabetes and in setting targets for achieving results. The momentum of the movement, however, decreased after the World Health Organization put Diabetes lower down on its list of priorities.

Recently there have been a number of actions that have underlined a resurgence of interest in the disease across the European Union i.e.:

- the EU Health Council in 2004 stressed the importance of developing a coordinated European strategy for diabetes
- the EU Health Commissioner stated in 2004 that he would "Give his full attention to the growing diabetes epidemic"
- Austria made Type 2 diabetes a key health priority during its Presidency in 2006
- the European Parliament in April 2006 urged the European Commission and the European Council to make the care and prevention of diabetes a priority and to develop a European-wide strategy to tackle the disease

The conclusions of an EU conference on Prevention of Type 2 Diabetes organized in Vienna in February 2006 with recommendations for the implementation of a Diabetes EU policy were presented to the formal Health Council in June 2006.

The time is ripe for individuals and organizations with an interest in diabetes to make the best use of the current attention being given to diabetes within the EU community.

Concrete action is now needed to address a disease that is thought to affect about 50 million people in the European Union; half of these do not know that they have the disease. Standards of healthcare vary widely across the Union and, of those individuals treated for the disease, a considerable number receive sub optimal care. Diabetes kills as many people worldwide as does AIDS and leaves countless others crippled with complications causing heart attacks, strokes, kidney disease, blindness and amputation.

Diabetes is expensive, costing the European Union 50 billion euros per year to treat.
Treating complications is much more expensive than treating properly the disease itself.

Mechanisms have to be put in place to collect and analyse comparable epidemiological evidence. This needs cooperation among all member states. It also requires the establishment of a standard dataset and the development of appropriate information technology for the analysis of the data and the dissemination of the results.

B.I.R.O. is a three year program started on the 1st December 2005 directly funded by the EU under the Public Health Program (DG-SANCO). The aim of the project is to develop an information system that will pool outputs from European regional diabetes databases for the purpose of analysing the data and producing routine summary diabetes reports, including population-based, standardized performance indicators whose timely availability still represent a major concern.

The consortium that is running the project is headed by the University of Perugia and consists of partners across Europe, including Scotland, Norway, Austria and Italy, Malta, Cyprus and Romania.

The project will define a set of agreed clinical guidelines and a minimum dataset that can be used as a common data reference for the extraction of compatible data at the international level. Software will be developed for secure information exchange and for analytical tools that will produce a range of outputs. The resulting system will apply open source software in a self-sustainable way. A process of "privacy impact assessment" will ensure compliance with privacy and data protection laws. The result will be a working prototype that can be later expanded to include a large number of regions/countries directly contributing to the construction of the European Public Health web portal.

The proposed system approach, based on a highly collaborative, flexible and innovative architecture, offers a sustainable solution that could be conveniently applied at different levels of national and regional health systems, representing a possible general model for other diseases.

BIRO represents the ultimate solution to translate local action into European policy, using health information as a strategic component for the coordinated and continuous prevention, care and management of diabetes.

References:

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3. Diabetes EU policy recommendations (http://www.fend.org/news_assets/diabetes_eu_policypaper.pdf)
4. EU Conference on Prevention of Type 2 Diabetes, 15/16 February 2006, Vienna. <http://www.diabetesconference.at/>
5. Vienna Declaration on Diabetes (http://www.globalnews.idf.org/2006/03/vienna_declarat.html)