

**European ME Alliance Statement
WHO Regional Committee Meeting for Europe
27-29 October 2026, Copenhagen, Denmark**

Agenda Item 9: Ageing is living: a strategy for promoting a lifetime of health and well-being in the WHO European Region 2026-2030

Honourable Chair, distinguished delegates,

If this strategy is truly about a lifetime of health and well-being, it must also address what happens when people develop severe, long-term disabilities, sometimes early in life.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, known as ME and sometimes referred to as ME/CFS, can leave people housebound or bedbound, dependent on others for basic daily activities. For some, participation in education, employment and community life becomes impossible.

A defining feature of ME is post-exertional malaise where even minimal physical or cognitive activity can trigger a profound and prolonged worsening of symptoms. In severe cases, this deterioration may last months or lead to a sustained loss of function.

WHO's 'European disability framework' states that persons with disabilities, and their needs, should be fully included in healthcare planning and delivery. That means health systems must be accessible to people with severe ME and other fluctuating, complex, and poorly recognized disabling conditions.

Because this is also a matter of human rights, the European ME Alliance urges implementation of three safeguards:

First, application of a genuine life-course and disability-inclusive approach, recognising that severe disability can occur at any age.

Second, access to appropriate, person-centred health and social care, including home-based and long-term care, financial and personal assistance, and support for unpaid carers.

Third, protection from avoidable harm caused by inappropriate care, disbelief or failure to accommodate post-exertional malaise. Such failures can trigger repeated episodes of deterioration, lasting loss of function, and additional physical harm and psychological trauma.

No person who develops a severe disability early in life should have to wait decades, until they reach old age, for their right to long-term care, inclusion and dignity to be recognised.

A lifetime approach to health cannot stop when disability begins.

Thank you.

European ME Alliance website: <https://www.europeanmealliance.org/emea-news-whoe-RCP76.shtml>