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Letter to the Editor

Letter to the Editor: Integrating Health Literacy Into National Diabetes Prevention Policies

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Recent multicenter studies across Europe have reinforced a critical and often underestimated determinant of type 2 diabetes (T2D) risk: health literacy. As European health systems confront rising diabetes prevalence, the emerging evidence underscores that health literacy is not merely an individual skill but a structural factor shaping prevention, early detection, and long-term disease management [1, 2].

Large European consortia such as HLS-EU, Diabetes Literacy Project, and subsequent multicountry cohorts have consistently demonstrated that individuals with limited health literacy are less likely to engage in preventive behaviors, accurately interpret risk information, or navigate screening pathways [3]. These findings align with the results of a recent Turkish cross-sectional study examining ministry employees, which reported that 59% of participants had problematic or inadequate health literacy, and that lower health literacy was associated with higher T2D risk scores at the descriptive level [4]. Although multivariate analysis in that study did not identify health literacy as an independent predictor once age and perceived health were controlled, the pattern remains consistent with broader European evidence: health literacy influences the behaviors and decisions that ultimately shape metabolic risk trajectories.

European multicenter studies [5, 6] further highlight that low health literacy disproportionately affects populations already vulnerable to T2D—older adults, individuals with lower socioeconomic status, and migrant communities. These groups often face cumulative barriers: limited access to preventive services, lower digital health literacy, and reduced capacity to interpret increasingly complex health information. As digital health tools become central to diabetes prevention and risk assessment, this gap is widening.

The implications for national policy are profound. Health literacy must be recognized as a modifiable, population-level determinant of diabetes risk. Countries that have integrated health literacy into their national health strategies—such as Austria, the Netherlands, and parts of Scandinavia—demonstrate improved uptake of preventive services and more equitable health outcomes. Türkiye and other European nations stand to benefit from similar structural approaches.

Based on the converging evidence from European multicenter studies and recent national research, I propose three policy priorities:

1. Embed health literacy into national diabetes prevention frameworks

National diabetes strategies should include routine assessment of health literacy, targeted interventions for high-risk groups, and integration of health literacy indicators into monitoring systems. This approach aligns with WHO recommendations and strengthens early detection pathways [7].

2. Scale digital health literacy programs

As risk assessment tools (such as FINDRISC), telemedicine, and digital lifestyle interventions become standard, digital health literacy must be treated as a core competency. Tailored programs for older adults, public sector employees, and low-income communities can reduce disparities in risk awareness and preventive behavior.

3. Promote health-literate healthcare and workplace environments

The workplace-based findings from the Turkish study highlight the value of organizational interventions. Simplified

communication, clear risk explanations, and supportive preventive programs within institutions can significantly enhance engagement with diabetes prevention.

In conclusion, the growing body of European multicenter evidence makes one point unmistakably clear: strengthening health literacy is a strategic necessity for reducing T2D risk at the population level. National policies that integrate health literacy into prevention, digital health, and organizational practice will not only improve metabolic outcomes but also advance health equity across Europe [8].

Yours faithfully,

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