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# HEALTHY AGEING THINK & DO TANK



## An EIT Food Position Paper

Knowledge & Innovation Community on  
Food, part of the European Institute of  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As global populations age rapidly—with the number of people over 60 projected to reach 1.4 billion by 2030—there is an urgent need to shift from reactive to proactive strategies that promote healthy ageing. Chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and age-related health issues are rising, placing enormous pressure on healthcare systems. The World Health Organization and the UN’s “Decade of Healthy Ageing” emphasize the importance of supporting not just longer lives, but healthier ones.

Nutrition is a cornerstone of healthy ageing, with balanced diets, physical activity, and social engagement proven to delay functional decline. However, existing initiatives are often fragmented and limited in scope. The EIT Food Healthy Ageing Think & Do Tank (HAT&DT) was established to close critical gaps in scientific knowledge, product development, public awareness, and stakeholder coordination.

EIT Food HAT&DT unites experts from academia, industry, NGOs, and policy to deliver

system-wide change. Its holistic strategy is structured around four pillars: research and innovation, education, policy advocacy, and equity in access. Key activities include reformulating foods for better nutritional quality, promoting early-life interventions, and developing personalized nutrition strategies.

Three dedicated working groups focus on:

- Dietary Strategies to Prevent Age-Related NCDs
- Targeted Approaches for Healthy Ageing
- Enhancing Wellbeing Through Microbiome Health.

Together, these efforts aim to empower people to age healthily and actively, with measurable impact on public health outcomes. EIT Food HAT&DT invites partners across sectors to collaborate in shaping a future where healthy ageing is not just possible but expected.



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# INTRODUCTION

## The growing need for healthy ageing solutions

As populations age rapidly worldwide, the need for proactive approaches across life course to promote health and wellness is becoming essential. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) by 2030, the global population aged 60 and above is projected to increase by 34%, reaching 1.4 billion. While this demographic shift reflects remarkable gains in life expectancy, it also brings a surge in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and age-related conditions that place growing pressure on healthcare systems and diminish older adults' quality of life. Age-related changes affect individuals holistically, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, shaping daily choices that contribute to overall well-being. The UN's "Decade of Healthy Ageing" (2021-2030) calls for urgent action to address these challenges, emphasizing not only lifespan but also quality of life by fostering functional abilities as

people age. Among the key pillars of healthy ageing, **nutrition stands out as a powerful tool to enhance both longevity and well-being**. A holistic approach, combining balanced dietary choices with physical activity, stress management, and social engagement, can help prevent functional decline.

The **EIT Food Healthy Ageing Think & Do Tank (HAT&DT)** is a multidisciplinary initiative whose mission is to translate scientific research into practical strategies that promote **healthy ageing through food**. Bringing together researchers, academics and industry leaders, EIT Food HAT&DT aims to drive innovation in nutritional science, food systems, and health-focussed interventions, addressing the evolving needs of Europe's ageing population.





# CHALLENGES IN HEALTHY AGEING

## Addressing gaps in knowledge, products, and public awareness

Despite growing awareness of healthy ageing, significant gaps remain in understanding and addressing the complex needs of ageing populations, emphasizing the necessity of a dedicated initiative like EIT Food HAT&DT. While existing efforts are valuable, they often lack integration and coordination beyond local initiatives, are too narrowly focused, or have limited impact. To effectively support healthy ageing, we must move beyond treating the elderly people and instead implement proactive, population-wide strategies that address the root causes of nutrition-related diseases throughout the entire life course. This includes policy shifts, education, innovative food design, and strong cross-sector collaboration.

Key challenges include:

**Knowledge Gaps:** *Insufficient scientific data on the impact of diet and nutrition on age-related health conditions:* There is an incomplete understanding of the diverse health needs of ageing adults. Scientific research on the impact of diet on age-related conditions remains insufficient, making it difficult to develop effective evidence-based dietary solutions. There are several unmet health needs in older adults such as malnutrition (including under and over nutrition); micronutrient deficiencies and limited accessibility to nutritious food that make necessary a shift to strategies for a life-course approach to nutrition. Several voices argue that interventions targeting older adults may come too late, and that early-life interventions could have greater long-term impact.



### **Limited Product and Service**

**Development:** The market lacks a sufficient range of products and services designed to meet the specific needs of older adults, leaving many without accessible and effective dietary solutions. A shift toward preventing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) — like obesity, diabetes, and CVD should be tackled through early dietary interventions, public health education campaigns and school and workplace-based nutrition programs.

**Awareness Deficiency:** Public understanding of preventive, life-course approaches to healthy ageing are limited. Many people are unaware that early lifestyle changes significantly influence long-term health outcomes, highlighting the need to educate and engage the public and healthcare systems. Lack of personalized nutrition advice, insufficient preventive care, and minimal community engagement or outreach are challenges to address all over Europe.



### **Fragmented Stakeholder Networks:**

Collaboration between key players in food and healthcare remains weak, and policy support for integrated healthy ageing strategies is inadequate, hindering large-scale impact. These challenges emphasize the urgent need for a holistic, multidisciplinary Think & Do Tank to bridge critical gaps, drive change through research and innovation, shape policies, leverage existing data and enhance public awareness, ultimately fostering a healthier ageing population.



# OUR UNIQUE APPROACH

## Why the EIT Food Healthy Ageing Think & Do Tank is essential

The EIT Food HAT&DT is uniquely positioned to address the complex needs of ageing populations in a cohesive and impactful way. By integrating expertise across multiple disciplines, we aim developing comprehensive solutions that encompass nutrition, physiology and policy to meet the evolving demands of an ageing demographic.:

Our **members** comprise delegates from various sectors, including:

- **Food Industry**: Specialized in nutrition, dietetics, and food manufacturing.
- **Academic Institutions**: Research expertise in ageing physiology, human microbiome science, and technology transfer.
- **NGOs & Universities**: Focused on consumer research, market analytics, and regulatory compliance.
- **Research Institutions**: Expertise in data management and technology-driven innovation.



**Why EIT Food HAT&DT is essential:** Unlike fragmented efforts, EIT Food HAT&DT takes a holistic solution-driven approach, bridging research, policy, and practical implementation to driving system-wide change in healthy ageing. Our multidisciplinary collaboration fosters a creative environment enabling innovative and sustainable approaches to ageing that translates scientific insights into real-world impact.



## Vision and mission: shaping a healthier future for ageing populations

We envision a future where food systems are fully aligned with the needs of ageing adults, supporting their well-being and enabling them to lead active, fulfilling lives.

Our mission is to tackle the health challenges of ageing by **advancing nutrition-focused science, developing targeted food and health interventions, and mobilizing public and private stakeholders across Europe**. We promote dietary lifestyle choices that, when combined with physical activity, stress management, and social engagement, help prevent functional decline and enhance quality of life.



## A holistic strategy: research, education, policy, and accessibility

EIT Food HAT&DT adopts a holistic approach based on four key pillars to address the complexities of healthy ageing:

**Research & Innovation:** We will develop evidence-based dietary solutions to prevent and manage age-related conditions. By advancing research on optimal dietary patterns, we aim to enhance functional ability and overall well-being in older age. We will put focus on innovation while collaborating with food industry in reformulation to make popular food higher in fibre, lower in salt/sugar; and to encourage development of gut friendly functional foods with pro and prebiotics and bioavailable proteins.

**Education:** We strive to raise public awareness of the critical role of early-life lifestyle choices play in ageing. By emphasizing preventive measures, we help reduce the prevalence of

NCDs and other age-related health challenges. Education through targeted campaigns, guidelines, consumer tools will be considered; as well as tailor campaigns by life stage, biological needs, and social context.

**Policy & Advocacy:** Through collaboration with policymakers, we advocate for integrating healthy ageing into preventive healthcare policies, securing funding for ageing-related research and innovation, and shaping regulations that support long-term well-being. We are aligned with EU-wide regulatory goals and health targets for ageing populations.

**Equity & Accessibility:** We are committed to inclusive and cost-effective solutions, ensuring that ageing populations, regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, have access to advancements in nutrition and healthcare.

# Focused working groups: targeted solutions for sustainable impact

To drive targeted progress, EIT Food HAT&DT has established three **strategic working groups**, each focusing on high-impact areas in healthy ageing:

## Working Group 1: Dietary Strategies for Preventing Age-Related NCDs

This group researches and promotes both individual nutrients and dietary patterns to prevent chronic diseases prevalent in ageing populations, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, which often link to neurodegeneration and cognitive decline. Additionally, the group explores interindividual differences in dietary response, investigating how specific nutrients influence ageing and disease progression at the individual level.



### Key Insights (“Think”):

- Investigate the impact of reducing salt, sugar, and saturated fats while increasing fibre and polyunsaturated fats on multiple outcome measures.
- Focus on bioactive nutrients, such as vitamin D, to reduce risks like hypertension, glucotoxicity, and lipotoxicity.
- Explore how chronic inflammation and deregulated nutritional signalling are related to nutritional intake and contribute to NCD development.
- Understand how Mediterranean-style diets are predictive of successful ageing.

### Possible Actions (“Do”):

- Educate stakeholders (healthcare professionals, consumers, food producers) on the link between diet, lifestyle, NCDs, and healthy ageing.
- Promote dietary shifts to healthier options (e.g., whole grains, low-salt foods, plant-based proteins) while preserving taste
- Personalize nutrition by identifying effective interventions to reduce chronic inflammation and bolster immune health.
- Advocate for policies promoting accessible, healthy diets through educational programs.
- Use validated dietary pattern scores (e.g., AHEI, DASH, DII) as educational tools to benchmark dietary quality in interventions or public awareness campaigns.



## Working Group 2: Targeted Approaches for Healthy Ageing

Focussing on tailored dietary approaches, this group develops personalized nutrition strategies that address specific nutritional needs throughout life, optimizing well-being and resilience as individuals age.

### Key Insights (“Think”):

- Identify barriers preventing individuals from making healthy choices, despite adequate knowledge.
- Define “critical windows of change” where individuals are more likely to adopt healthy lifestyle practices.
- Analyse the impact of socio-environmental factors on sustained behaviour change.

### Possible Actions (“Do”):

- Identify windows of opportunity to intervene when individuals are most motivated to change their lifestyle.
- Shape policies targeting populations most receptive to food-related behavioural changes.
- Educate healthcare professionals and policymakers on prevention techniques and support systems.
- Collaborate with industry to develop products supporting a healthy diet throughout various life stages.



## Working Group 3: Enhancing Wellbeing Through Microbiome Health

This group examines the critical role of diet in shaping gut health and the microbiome composition, with a particular focus on preventing dysbiosis and fostering a balanced microbiome to enhance overall health and longevity.



### Key Insights (“Think”):

- Focus on preventing dysbiosis through diet, given the microbiome’s high intra-individual variability.
- Utilize low-grade inflammation markers as indicators of microbiome balance.
- Balance the focus on protein with the importance of dietary fibre, which play a crucial role in preventing dysbiosis.

### Possible Actions (“Do”):

- Conduct **proof-of-concept studies** to demonstrate the benefits of fibre, polyphenols, probiotics and postbiotics to improve the health of humans and their microbiome.
- Explore opportunities to enhance the **circularity of the food system** by valorising waste streams from fruits and vegetables.
- **Educate consumers** on the impact of diet on gut health to promote behaviour change.
- Utilize effective **communication strategies** to deliver clear, engaging messages on microbiome health.

*By integrating these focus areas, EIT Food HAT&DT is driving transformative change in healthy ageing, improving both individual well-being and broader societal health outcomes.*





## CONCLUSION

The EIT Food HAT&DT is a pioneering force in the field of healthy ageing, addressing the urgent health needs of Europe's ageing population through a cohesive interdisciplinary approach. By combining targeted research, strategic policy advocacy, and public awareness initiatives, we are working to transform the food system into one that actively supports well-being throughout life, empowering individuals to age healthily and lead active, fulfilling lives.

Success will be measured through a multi-tiered framework of input, output, outcome,

and impact indicators, ensuring that progress is captured at every stage from awareness and product reformulation to biological health outcomes and policy change.

We invite partners, policymakers, and stakeholders to join us in this mission and support our efforts, recognizing the vast potential for positive impact on both individual well-being and public health across Europe. Together, we can shape a future where healthy ageing is accessible, prioritized, and celebrated.



*Up to date information in our website:  
EIT Food Healthy Ageing Think & Do  
Tank - EIT Food*

# CONTRIBUTORS



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## ABOUT EIT FOOD

EIT Food is the world's largest and most dynamic agri-food innovation community. We accelerate innovation to build a future-fit agri-food system that produces healthy and sustainable food for all.

Supported by the EU, we invest in projects, organisations and individuals that share our goals for a healthy and sustainable food system. We unlock innovation potential in businesses and universities and create and scale agri-food startups to bring new technologies and products to market. We equip entrepreneurs and professionals with the skills needed to transform the food system and put consumers at the heart of our work, helping build trust by reconnecting them to the origins of their food.

We are one of eight innovation communities established by the European Institute for Innovation & Technology (EIT), an independent EU body set up in 2008 to drive innovation and entrepreneurship across Europe.

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