20 years of SME Regulation from the perspective of People Living With Rare Diseases

- **Relevant SME Incentives for Orphan Drugs**
  - Regulatory Assistance and Fee Incentives: Protocol assistance (Orphan Regulation)
  - Expert Guidance and Training: workshops, info days, and personalised briefing meetings
  - PRIME Support and Advanced Therapy Incentives: early dialogue, pre-submission advice, and rapid assessment pathways
  - Translation Assistance

- **SME Challenges in Rare Diseases and Orphan Drugs (from the survey outcomes)**
  - Regulatory and Administrative Burden, complexity in EU regulations
  - Access to early-stage and diversified funding as well as specialised support for finding partners and investors
  - Market Access and Pricing: support efforts to harmonise HTA (Health Technology Assessment) bodies and improve early dialogue

Takeaways for SMEs Developing Orphan Drugs

The EMA's SME support program directly addresses core hurdles that confront rare disease and orphan drug developers, with recognised benefits in fee relief, expert support, training, and incentives for high-need products

The survey highlights the ongoing need for regulatory simplification and for broader awareness of specialised services (like scientific advice and advanced therapy incentives), which are particularly pertinent in the rare/orphan space - additional outreach and tailored approach are needed to maximise their impact

How can the upcoming Biotech Act support SMEs: the perspective of PLWRD

Strategic Opportunities for SMEs

- SMEs as Innovation Drivers for Rare diseases: critical role in translational research, development of advanced biotechnologies, and therapy pipelines for ultra-rare conditions
- Cluster Approach: rare disease-focused biotech cluster within the Act, to centralise fragmented initiatives and enable SMEs to access collaborative infrastructure, manufacturing hubs, and shared resources
- SME-Specific Incentives: targeted grants, innovation prizes, tax credits, and SME-friendly financing—both public and private. Need to codify dedicated funding calls, simplified application processes, and strategic investment streams tailored for SMEs, especially those carrying promising science through preclinical and early clinical development
- Support for Manufacturing and Scale-Up: SMEs often struggle to access GMP-compliant facilities and scale manufacturing. Proposal for investment in shared, modular manufacturing infrastructure and decentralised production models that SMEs can use to bring therapies to market more efficiently

Addressing Barriers for SMEs

- Regulatory Complexity and Harmonisation: simplified, flexible pathways to reduce "valley of death" attrition and speed up lab-to-patient translation
- Market Access and Procurement: to overcome challenges negotiating access and reimbursement at national levels can delay therapy availability.
- Data, AI, and Open Science: better access for SMEs to pan-European data resources, AI infrastructure, high-quality registries, and open science incentives. (FAIR principles, ORPHAcodes)
- Fast-Track Status & PPPs: SME fast-track mechanisms for regulatory and manufacturing support, and public-private-partnerships (PPP) models, enabling SMEs to share risks and resources with larger entities and academic centers.
- Dedicated SME support for clinical research and evidence generation: tailored advice for SME developers, provide trial designs suited to small populations, and invest in interoperable real-world data
- Workforce Development: Funding for SME-focused biotech skills training (AI, diagnostics, regulatory science, manufacturing) is recommended, with ERNs and Centres of Expertise proposed as hubs for modular and lifelong learning.