

Europe's Beating Cancer plan: Launch of an EU-wide debate

On 4 February 2020, on the occasion of World Cancer Day, the European Commission will initiate a broad stakeholder debate on the proposed Europe's Beating Cancer plan, to be rolled out towards the end of the year. The launch event will be held in the European Parliament in Brussels, supported by the MEPs Against Cancer Interest Group. It will bring together political leaders, representatives from international organisations, health ministries, leading academics, scientists and health professionals, the private sector and non-governmental organisations, and cancer patients and survivors.

Cancer, one of the Commission's main priorities in the area of health

Cancer is the second most common cause of death in the EU after cardiovascular disease, and the number of people with cancer is rising as the population ages. In addition to causing suffering, cancer places a vast burden on the Member States' health and social systems, putting pressure on national budgets. An estimated 40 % of all cancers on average are preventable, and survival rates are on the up. Yet, despite the EU's [cancer policy](#) and [long-standing action](#), including funding for health under the current and [future](#) framework programmes for research and innovation, there are many challenges ahead. Given the importance of tackling cancer for the EU's future, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged in her [political guidelines](#) to 'put forward a European plan to fight cancer, to support Member States in improving cancer control and care'. In her [mission letter](#), she tasked Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, with putting forward Europe's Beating Cancer plan; it should 'propose actions to strengthen our approach at every key stage of the disease: prevention, diagnosis, treatment, life as a cancer survivor and palliative care. There should be a close link with the research mission on cancer in the future Horizon Europe programme'.

Health and Food Safety Commissioner Kyriakides' hints on the forthcoming plan

During her hearing before Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) in October 2019, Stella Kyriakides – then Commissioner designate – made the following [commitment](#):

'I see our Beating Cancer plan touching upon all the actions in my mission letter, farm to fork, the Green Deal, anti-microbial resistance, innovation, affordability of medicines. It needs to address prevention, diagnosis, treatment, research, survivorship and palliative care. It needs to involve sectors and industries beyond the health sector, including education and environment.'

In her [keynote speech](#) at a December 2019 event on 'Better access to cancer care in Europe', held at the European Parliament, Commissioner Kyriakides said her plan aimed to harness collective power by joining forces and working closely with all stakeholders, including patients, 'who should always have a seat at the table when decisions about them are made'. The 'ambitious but realistic plan' would focus on several areas: **health in all policies** ('We need to see cancer approached horizontally'); **prevention** ('Prevention will of course always be the best cure of all'); **screening and early diagnosis** ('We know from scientific evidence over the last decades that early diagnosis saves lives'); **access to optimal treatment** ('All cancer patients have the fundamental right to optimal care, the same access to medicine and the same new innovative treatments, and participation in clinical trials'); **quality of life in survivorship** ('Too often, we focus on the tumour, and not on the person'); **palliative care** ('We need to address the needs and work towards ensuring that palliative care is accessible to all'); **better data and e-health** ('We need to maximise the potential of e-health – which can also help to reduce inequalities'). Commissioner Kyriakides also said that she would like the discussion on the plan to be 'as inclusive as possible', and that its success depended on 'the broadest participation possible'.

Concretely – in the area of prevention, for instance – the plan would focus on tobacco, alcohol abuse, environmental factors, vaccination, physical exercise, and healthy diets. It would rely on improving the way food is produced and consumed through the new [Farm to Fork strategy](#) as part of the [European Green Deal](#).

MEPs' work on cancer-related policies

In previous parliamentary terms, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) introduced motions for resolutions on [prostate cancer](#) (2015), [lung cancer](#) (2017) and [women's cancers and related comorbidities](#) (2019). In resolutions adopted by the whole house, Parliament noted, among other things, that [childhood cancer](#) remains the first cause of death by disease in children aged one year and over, and that 6 000 young people die of cancer each year in Europe (2016). It urged the Council and the Commission to strengthen Member States' capacity to negotiate affordable prices of medicines, including for [cancer](#) (2017). Individual Members have addressed questions to the Commission, for instance, on better coverage of [paediatric cancer](#) in European research, [work-related cancer](#), measures to [combat cancer among men](#), designating 2020 as [European Year against Cancer](#), [5G and cancer](#), the link between [low alcohol consumption and cancer](#), and the [European cancer plan](#). Parliament is also [expected](#) to set up a special committee on cancer, with a vote in plenary on the issue in the coming weeks. This would facilitate the pooling of expertise from all relevant committees in Parliament, as well as giving more time to consult experts and, especially, patients.

The [MEPs Against Cancer \(MAC\) Interest Group](#) is an informal group of MEPs working together to improve cancer control and prevention in Europe. In the 2019-2024 parliamentary term, MAC has 136 members from different political groups and EU Member States. The chairs are Dr Véronique Trillet-Lenoir (Renew, France) and Loucas Fourlas (EPP, Cyprus). MAC receives secretarial support from the Association of European Cancer Leagues, a non-profit organisation representing national and regional cancer societies across Europe.

Stakeholders' views and expectations

➤ **Patients and health professionals.** Representatives from the Association of European Cancer Leagues, the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC), the European Oncology Nursing Society and European Organisation for Rare Diseases (Eurordis) met with Health Commissioner Kyriakides on 20 January 2020. The ECPC [asked](#) for a network of comprehensive cancer centres to be created for each million inhabitants, that the [European Reference Networks](#) be included in Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, and that people who have recovered from cancer receive long-term follow-up care, including psychological and physical rehabilitation. In a December 2019 [joint statement](#), organisations representing patients and health professionals, among them the ECPC, the European Federation of Nurses Association and the European Society of Cardiology, called on EU policy-makers to take cancer-related complications and comorbidities into account when designing the plan. The European CanCer Organisation (ECCO) [is said](#) to have called on the Commission to build the plan on a foundation of existing work and efforts from around the EU, cautioning against 'reinventing the wheel'. ECCO [reportedly](#) offered the Commissioner suggestions for goals for the plan. They include: a 70 % average long-term survival rate for patients with cancer by 2035; doubling survival for many tumour cases with poor prognosis; eliminating [HPV](#)-caused cancers as a public health problem; and halving deaths and late effects from childhood cancers.

➤ **Healthcare providers.** Given the 'unique European focus on cancer research and treatment' in the coming years, the European Hospital and Healthcare Federation (HOPE) is joining the organisation of the March 2020 [annual lecture](#) of the Federation of European Academies of Medicine ([FEAM](#)) Forum on how policy-makers can help support the uptake of [immunotherapy](#) treatments, reduce barriers to access, and encourage further research into this promising field.

➤ **Industry.** In a January 2020 [blogpost](#) on how to address Europe's cancer burden, the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) stressed the need to improve the sustainability and integration of cancer care, accelerate the time it takes to get new treatments to patients, find new models for paying for cancer medicines, and put resources behind fighting cancer. Key messages from the EFPIA-commissioned [Comparator report on cancer in Europe 2019](#) include: research is fundamental for achieving improvements in cancer care; primary prevention and screening are two areas where European countries still have opportunities to improve policies to reduce cancer incidence and mortality; and access to cancer medicines is important for improving patient outcomes.

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