

Trio Presidency of the Council of the European Union – Germany, Portugal and Slovenia

Declaration on effective cancer research “Europe: Unite against Cancer”



Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA

MINISTRO DA CIÊNCIA,
TECNOLOGIA E ENSINO SUPERIOR



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND SPORT

Cancer is still one of the biggest challenges facing modern medicine and thus society as a whole. Each year, more than 2.7 million people in Europe are diagnosed with cancer. The number of new cancer cases will double worldwide over the next 20 years while more and more people will live with the disease for many years. It is necessary to identify new possibilities for early detection, diagnosis, treatment and aftercare and to transfer them from bench to bedside as fast as possible in order to further enhance the patients' prospects and quality of life. Effective and accepted methods for cancer prevention and health maintenance need to be developed and implemented to reduce the number of new cancer cases in the long term.

Coordinated efforts across the EU are required to achieve these goals. No country can succeed on its own. The seeming inequalities both within and among EU countries regarding prevention, treatment and care require improved coordination of policies as well as of high-quality research at the regional/national and EU level.

Significant progress has already been made

Europe has successfully worked together in the ERA-NET on Translational Cancer Research (TRANSCAN) for several years, coordinating joint funding programmes to promote excellent translational cancer research with a network across Europe. Existing European research networks such as Cancer Core Europe and Cancer Prevention Europe have been strengthened and expanded and have already produced amazing results. They also help to close the gap between basic research, clinical research and application in the health sector. The latter allows for the targeted and quick translation of research results into clinical practice. After all, health research can only be successful if it translates into tangible benefits for patients.

It should become a standard that all patients in Europe have access to state-of-the-art cancer therapies. Comprehensive Cancer Centres are already ensuring this today, developing treatments tailored to the individual needs of the patients based on the latest scientific findings.

Recently, the European Academy of Cancer Sciences (EACS), and several European organizations and cancer centres joined forces to define common goals for the implementation of a mission-oriented approach to cancer in Horizon Europe. They emphasized the relevance of translational and clinical research along the full translational chain, from prevention to therapeutics.

Europe must consider an impact on society at large by uniting countries to substantially reduce the enormous cancer burden in the European Union (EU) and improve the health-related quality of life of patients by promoting cost-effective, evidence-based best practices in cancer prevention, treatment, and care. Our goal should focus on achieving a 10-year cancer-specific survival for $\frac{3}{4}$ of the adult patients by the year 2030 in the EU member states. It should also be our goal to ensure that not a single person or region in Europe is left behind.

It has become increasingly evident both at EU and national level that active patient participation during the complete translational cycle from cancer research to patient care is a crucial factor of success. It ensures that the needs of all patients are met and thus helps to gain acceptance.

Measures adopted by the trio nations

In the past year, Germany has intensified its efforts to fight cancer. Following the creation of the National Cancer Plan by the Federal Ministry of Health in 2008, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) launched the National Decade against Cancer in cooperation with many other partners in early 2019. The goal is to connect the most important stakeholders, to create relevant structures and to strengthen cancer research itself. One priority is the transfer of cutting-edge research results into everyday patient care so that all patients in Germany can quickly benefit from medical progress, no matter where they live. During the Decade, patients are actively involved in the research process – from the development of research questions and participation in research itself to the dissemination of results. The BMBF has already launched several funding programmes and is working to establish four additional sites of the National Centre for Tumour Diseases (NCT). These measures are complemented by a comprehensive programme for dialogue, education and public relations.

Germany will provide an additional 2 million euros for the successful ERA-NET on TRANSCAN, increasing its funding by more than 50%. This active contribution to the EU Council Presidency will serve to strengthen and promote European research in the highly innovative field of immunotherapy.

In addition, Germany and the trio partners will initiate a process to systematically involve patients in European cancer research since long-term and visible participation increases transparency and the benefit of research. Thus, it not only improves societal confidence in research, but can also bring about a lasting change in scientific culture.

Additional perspectives and expertise from many people help to focus research on actual needs. Patients who have been actively involved in research are more likely to accept, support and use research and its results than those who have not. In this way, research projects can be geared to actual needs, successfully implemented and their results can subsequently be transferred into practice effectively.

The objective is to improve patient-centred cancer research as a standard in Europe in the long term and to align cancer research even more closely with the needs of cancer patients and their families. At the same time, it also emphasises the importance of active patient participation in the full translational cycle from research to patient care. It is also important to ensure that patients are more closely involved in cancer research. To this end, the trio presidency will promote patient-centred cancer research as a standard in Europe.

Portugal

Portugal has the ambition to reach the European targets for cancer research aimed at increased long-term survival and reduction of cancer related deaths. This can only be achieved by applying a comprehensive translational cancer research approach covering the entire cancer research continuum involving all parts of the cancer prevention therapy and care pathways. For this, cancer research has to interact with healthcare and be organized in all member states to promote international collaborations. The latter is essential to achieve the critical mass needed to develop personalized/precision cancer medicine.

Portugal is strengthening the national network of academic clinical centres in close articulation with the network of Comprehensive Cancer Centres, as a collective and

coordinated answer encompassing all the initiatives promoting the interdisciplinary and intersectoral research for the diagnosis, treatment and health-related quality of life. Outcomes research linked to health economics is fundamental for developing affordable cancer care and prevention.

In addition, to meet the increasing needs of new therapies training programs covering both research and advanced treatments have been initiated, not only in medical oncology but also radiation therapy, which is supported by a new proton facility.

Slovenia

Slovenia selected the fight against cancer as a health priority during its EU Council Presidency in 2008, and cancer research was among the priority topics of the initiative, which is now being revived and taken to the highest level of policymaking with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

The burden of cancer can only be systematically reduced in the long term if cancer is comprehensively controlled (Draft Council Conclusions on reducing the burden of cancer from 22 May 2008). For this purpose, the first National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) was established in 2010, which set goals to be achieved by 2015. In this period, a slower growth in cancer incidence was achieved, cancer mortality decreased for both genders and the survival rate of cancer patients in Slovenia increased compared to previous periods.

Experience from the first NCCP 2010–2015, the WHO guidelines and the European Commission guidelines from the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer (led by Slovenia), served as the basis for the National Cancer Control Programme 2017–2021. Its strategic objectives – to reduce incidence, improve survival, and provide a greater quality of life for cancer patients, can only be fulfilled through the coordinated efforts of all segments of the healthcare system defined in the specific objectives for primary and secondary prevention, diagnostics and treatment, rehabilitation, palliative care, research, education, monitoring the burden of cancer, and information technology. This year, one of the goals for fostering cancer research was achieved by expanding the Slovenian Cancer Registry from basic data set to additional diagnostic and treatment variables in the so-called clinical registries, making more data available for clinical research, whilst also enabling the monitoring of cancer care quality. Over the last decade, national cancer research funding has been consistent, increasing moderately. Researchers in the field have achieved globally comparable results.

Sharing knowledge, data and strategies – establishing a new European culture

The EU Council presidency trio is confident that the fight against cancer will be more successful if Europe relies on a shared network and acts in concert. We call on all EU member states to strengthen and further develop their existing national initiatives in the fields of prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment in order to network on a European level. This will allow us to make a substantial contribution to the research and innovation agenda on cancer in the forthcoming EU research programme “Horizon Europe”.

All cancer patients should have equal access to the best state-of-the-art prevention, diagnostics, treatment and aftercare methods, regardless of where in the European Union they live.

The trio presidency places special emphasis on the significance of leading national and interdisciplinary cancer centres with the highest quality in research, patient care and teaching in achieving this goal. At the same time, it also emphasises the importance of active patient participation in the full translational cycle from research to patient care, so that the patient is at the centre of shared decision-making.

Looking forward, it will be important to expand and connect all European cancer centres. The Organisation of European Cancer Institutes (OECI) already leads the way with its activities. Another excellent example is the creation of Cancer Core Europe and Cancer Prevention Europe with the aim of connecting cancer centres with the highest quality of translational, clinical and prevention research in order to develop innovative diagnostic agents, treatments and preventive interventions more quickly.

It is also important to ensure that patients are more closely involved in cancer research. To this end, the trio presidency will promote patient-centred cancer research as a standard in Europe.

Europe is united in the fight against cancer and we are pooling our strengths for the health of Europeans. In this context, European regulations will support and stimulate national processes.

We call on the EU member states to promote appropriate measures in their countries and to support the European networking of cancer centres.

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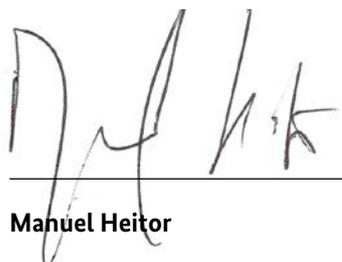
October 2020

Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, the Member States holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the 18-month period from July 2020 to December 2021, hereby present this Trio Presidency Declaration on effective cancer research “Europe: Unite against Cancer”



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