

Launch of the European Parliament Intergroup

CHALLENGE **CANCER**

Event report



On Wednesday 1 July 2020, the launch of the European Parliament Challenge Cancer Intergroup took place via webinar. The event was organised by the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC), which serves as the secretariat for the Intergroup.

Over 370 attendees participated in the event, which included discussions on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer care, the Cancer Mission, and how policymakers and stakeholders can work together to improve cancer care across Europe.

What did the speakers say?

MEP Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (EPP, Romania), *Chair of the Challenge Cancer Intergroup:*

- “Cancer cannot be defeated alone: this Intergroup was formed to bring together stakeholders from across the board.”
- “The ongoing initiatives to fight cancer in the EU are very valuable, and further support will come via the new EU4Health programme.”
- “The new Intergroup will be a two-way communication channel, a forum for MEPs from across the political spectrum to meet with patient groups, research institutions, medical societies, think tanks and other stakeholders to discuss cancer care.”

MEP Buşoi then delivered a message on behalf of **MEP Aldo Patriciello (EPP, Italy)**, *Co-Chair of the Challenge Cancer Intergroup:*

- “Today, 40% of cancers are preventable. However, only an average of 3% of our health budgets is spent on prevention in Europe.”
- “This blatant mismatch shows that we need to take this even more seriously by looking at all forms of prevention, from cancer awareness and screening programmes, to the promotion of healthy lifestyles, the fight against environmental pollution, and vaccination against cancer-related diseases such as HPV.”
- “As Vice-Chair of the Challenge Cancer Intergroup, I will make all forms of prevention a concrete priority to ensure that all preventable cancers are in fact prevented.”

MEP Alessandra Moretti (S&D, Italy), *Co-chair of the Challenge Cancer Intergroup:*

- “Cancer touches all European citizens, but unfortunately cancer care is not equal across Europe.”
- “There has been progress made in cancer care, including treatment, and I welcome the Commission’s commitment to tackling cancer.”

MEP Frédérique Ries (Renew, Belgium), *Co-chair of the Challenge Cancer Intergroup:*

- “European commitment to tackle cancer has never been stronger. For instance, this is demonstrated by this Intergroup and the European Parliament’s decision to establish a Special Committee on Beating Cancer.”
- “The concept of survivorship and the right to be forgotten is becoming increasingly important and should take into account the carer’s point of view.”

Setting the scene

Commissioner Stella Kyriakides, *European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety*:

- “Cancer affects us all in some way or another. This is why close multi-disciplinary collaboration and teamwork is needed, as it is only through teamwork that a patient can feel supported.”
- “The launch of the Intergroup is an example of this teamwork, which comes at an ideal time as the COVID-19 pandemic will place significant stress on European healthcare systems, including on cancer care.”
- “The Commission has launched initiatives to combat the effects of the pandemic, including the [Recovery Plan](#) and the [EU4Health Programme](#), as well as initiatives to tackle cancer directly. The Commission aims to publish [Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan](#) at the end of this year, and it will have synergies with other Commission initiatives, in a ‘health in all policies’ approach.”
- “I look forward to working with the Challenge Cancer Intergroup in the Parliament.”

Kathi Apostolidis, *President of the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC)*:

- “The Challenge Cancer Intergroup was conceived by ECPC thanks to the organisation’s long collaboration with the European Parliament, and will work in synergy with the Commission’s initiatives on cancer.”
- “ECPC will continue to address cancer care challenges in the future, with the European Parliament as an ally.”

Prof Francesco de Lorenzo, *former President of ECPC*:

- “The concept of survivorship is increasingly important due to progress in diagnosis and treatment, but there are also issues in survivorship care and quality of life.”
- I was happy to see that quality of life has been chosen as the third pillar in the recent publication ‘Conquering Cancer: Mission Possible’.

The Cancer Mission

Prof G Walter Ricciardi, *Chair of the Cancer Mission Board, Professor of Hygiene and Public Health at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome*:

- “[The Mission](#) has three pillars: Prevent what is preventable, Optimise diagnostics and treatments, Support quality of life. This year, the Mission Board aims to work on citizen engagement and developing the research and development calls under [Horizon Europe](#).”
- “The Cancer Mission Board aims to support and complement other actions in cancer care, including Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan.”
- “The Cancer Mission is indeed ‘mission possible’.”

Prof Dr Anton Berns, *President of the European Academy of Cancer Sciences, Emeritus Chairman of the Board of Directors, Netherlands Cancer Institute, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Hospital*:

- “Some of the actions that need to be taken to achieve a Mission on Cancer and tackle the current challenges facing cancer care in Europe include fighting the increasing prices of medicines and reducing inequalities.”
- “The entire cancer continuum needs to be covered in cancer research, quality standards need to be met and innovative projects need to be incentivised to allow for creative research.”



Cancer in the era of COVID-19

Prof Dr Michael Baumann, Chairman and Scientific Director at the German Cancer Research Centre:

- “Cancer patients face multiple inequalities which were worsened during the COVID-19 crisis.”
- “The different challenges for healthcare systems and for cancer research should be followed by clear actions to prepare for the future.”
- “These include the re-establishment of standard-of-care, capacity management, developing a surveillance system for COVID-19 and cancer, preventing shortages in equipment, upholding awareness of the growing cancer burden worldwide and increasing cancer research efforts as well as support.”

Prof Dr Bengt Jönsson, Professor Emeritus of the Stockholm School of Economics:

- “There is a need for more data regarding the relation between healthcare spending and the outcome for patients.” (*graphs mentioned can be found in [the Comparator report on cancer in Europe 2019](#)*)
- “There will be a diversion of cancer care resources in the short run, with increased disease burden in the longer run due to later detection, and effects of changes in management mitigated by attempts to maintain outcomes.”
- “There should be an increase in the importance of directing spending to the most cost-effective innovations. Costs from investing in different areas of cancer care need to be weighed against potential improvements in patient outcomes.”

The industry perspective on a strengthened approach to cancer care post COVID-19

Dr Antonis Kalemis, President of Nuclear Medicine Europe (NMEU):

- “Nuclear medicine as a diagnostic tool already helps 12 million patients per year in the European Union, among which 65% (8 million) are in oncology.”
- “Nuclear Medicine is a powerful tool for diagnosing and treating cancer. It contributes to early detection and it can help choose the right treatment. It also offers effective and safe treatment solutions for a range of malignancies with no or very minor side effects.”
- “Nuclear medicine is also strongly contributing to the development of personalised medicine.”

Dr Nathalie Moll, Director General, European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA):

- “The Challenge Cancer Intergroup will increase the level of policy priority that is given to cancer.”
- “Cancer is a terrible constellation of diseases of incredible complexity, with no one solution or approach. This is why teamwork is essential at every step of the way.”
- “It requires a mindset shift, similar to what has been done during the COVID-19 crisis, and increasing the level of trust and collaboration among all players to make sure that this social issue becomes a social responsibility.”



Closing remarks

Dr Oxana Domenti, *Head of WHO Regional Office Europe*:

- “I strongly believe that this Intergroup can play a key role in attracting the necessary political support as well as public attention to cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, and supportive care in the EU and beyond.” And “we totally agree with Commissioner Kyriakides and other speakers that tackling cancer, is more than an issue for the health sector alone”.
- “quality screening is important for early detection, but this should also go hand in hand with capacity building to ensure rapid diagnosis of symptomatic cancer ” The [WHO Europe Guide to Screening](#) and the accompanying policy brief published this year that can help countries make the best choices in term of screening”.
- “Learning from the COVID-19 crisis, European countries have the opportunity to reconsider how they work together making use of science, solidarity, and solutions to deliver health and prosperity to all.”

MEP Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (EPP, Romania), *Chair of the Challenge Cancer Intergroup*:

- “We need to build a strong Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan and encourage Member States to improve their cancer plans in order to help patients and lead to better results.”
- “We also need to focus on Horizon Europe with its specific Mission on Cancer and appropriate budget, and the EU4Health programme, the biggest ever health programme in the EU, to increase resilience and enforce health systems.”
- “The European Parliament Intergroup on cancer will need to build synergies, to act together and not duplicate efforts.”

The debate sessions

- **Matti Aapro**, *President of the European Cancer Patient Coalition*, underlined the need to ensure that European cancer initiatives cut across the entire care continuum, such as workforce needs, and addressing comorbidities, among others.
- **Prof Mark Lawler**, *Director of DATACAN, Cancer* spoke on how to ensure, by employing accurate data that Cancer is not the forgotten ‘C’ of the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Ray Pinto**, *Digital Transformation Policy Director, DIGITALEUROPE*, pointed out the importance of creating health systems that are ready to utilise digital technologies ahead of a potential second wave of COVID-19. Mr Pinto also reiterated the urgency for a common European health data space that can advance and accelerate research.
- **MEP Frances Fitzgerald**, *Chair of the Transforming Breast Cancer Together Initiative*, noted the importance of building bridges with organisations like the Transforming Breast Cancer Together Initiative and the Challenge Cancer Intergroup to get the best out of the work that has been done already.
- Other topics of debate included workforce issues in cancer care, patient safety issues and ensuring equal distribution of public health investment to prevent inequalities.

Outcomes of the webinar

- The speakers agreed that cancer can only be tackled through multi-disciplinary collaboration
- Speakers and participants alike were looking forward to the work of the Intergroup, enabling these multi-stakeholder conversations
- Some of the main issues raised included survivorship, the effects of the pandemic on cancer care and the opportunities provided by digitalisation

Our audience

Over 370 attendees participated in the event, including MEPs Buchner, Kuhot, Toia and Fitzgerald. Members of the European Cancer Organisation, Europa Donna, the European Society for Medical Oncology, and Digestive Cancers Europe were also present.

Further information on the event, including the recording, the speakers’ slides and the answered questions can be found on [the website of the Intergroup](#).

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