



Transforming Breast Cancer Together: Bridging the Gap in Breast Cancer Care

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in Europe, yet there are still huge gaps in breast cancer care. The current pandemic has deepened these challenges, as the continuity of treatments and care for patients have been severely disrupted.

To raise awareness on this pressing issue, Transforming Breast Cancer Together organised a virtual event focusing on the realities of living with breast cancer and highlighting potential solutions to bridge the gap in breast cancer care. The event brought together a distinguished panel of speakers across several areas of expertise who offered insights on early and advanced breast cancer care.

MEP Frances Fitzgerald, Chair of Transforming Breast Cancer Together initiative, stressed in her introductory remarks the need to recognise the profound social and emotional impact of breast cancer. She also highlighted that *in breast cancer, early care and prevention are crucial. We must make sure that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, screening and quality procedures are still available and that patients feel safe to reach out for proper medical support.*

European Commissioner for Health Stella Kyriakides emphasised the challenges faced by breast cancer patients this year. She ensured that the lessons taught by the pandemic, from highlighting inequalities to exposing difficult access to treatments and medicines, would be incorporated into Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. *"Each citizen in the European Union deserves the same quality of care, the same access to new medicines and the same innovative treatments – no matter where they live. Europe's Beating Cancer Plan aims to address the inequalities and fill in the gaps. We can and must do better"*, stated the Commissioner.

The event provided an opportunity for patient organisations and Transforming Breast Cancer Together members to share their initiatives, studies and reports, giving a voice to early and advanced breast cancer patients and survivors by revealing the often invisible challenges they face. *"1 out of 4 people believe that patients who have metastatic breast cancer should not talk about it with anyone other than their physician"* explained Dr Fatima Cardoso from ABC Global Alliance, underscoring the vital need to end the stigma towards breast cancer patients.

The challenges and consequences of breast cancer and its treatment have a severe impact on the quality of life for patients and their families. Grazia Scocca, from the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC), and Barbara Wilson, from Working With Cancer, explained that patients often encounter difficulties when asking for financial assistance or when returning to work, stressing the need for an appropriate level of protection and support. Further challenges were revealed in the Europa Donna study, presented by Marzia Zambon, concluding that there are significant shortcomings in breast cancer services in the European Union. *"In the 21st century, patients have the right to be operated on by expert breast surgeons in a centre of excellence"*, echoed Dr Isabel Rubio.

There is a lot of work ongoing at EU level and the European Parliament is committed to tackle cancer by ensuring better funding for research and innovation, highlighted MEP Alessandra Moretti. Ciarán Nicholl, Head of the Health in Society unit in the Joint Research Centre at the European Commission, added that the fight against cancer is a priority for the European Commission and that European institutions are now collaborating more than ever to tackle the issue.



The wide array of issues discussed during the event showcased the serious threat breast cancer poses to the health and economic stability of patients, their families and society as a whole. The panellists emphasized the need to recognise the daily challenges breast cancer patients face, and the pressing need to work at European level to transform breast cancer together once and for all.

About Transforming Breast Cancer Together

The 'Transforming Breast Cancer Together' initiative, was launched in 2017 following an event hosted in the European Parliament. Since then it has brought together policymakers, organisations and companies deeply committed to breast cancer care with the aim to provide continuity to common efforts to improve breast cancer care in Europe. The initiative, co-chaired by MEPs Frances Fitzgerald (EPP, Ireland) and Patrizia Toia (S&D, Italy) works tirelessly to increase the understanding of the daily realities of living with early and advanced breast cancer and to ensure that policymaking reflects both the individual and the societal disease burden.