

# Transforming Breast Cancer Together

Statement in response to the European Parliament Special Committee's on Beating Cancer draft report

5 July, 2021

Transforming Breast Cancer Together (TBCT) welcomes the European Parliament Special Committee's on Beating Cancer [draft report](#) on "strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer – towards a comprehensive and coordinated strategy". TBCT would like to commend the rapporteur, MEP Veronique Trillet-Lenoir for her proposed comprehensive and ambitious set of actions in view of the implementation of the European Commission's Beating Cancer Plan.

The draft report comes at a crucial moment, as policymakers and the cancer community reflect on the effects and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. These learnings must be echoed in the implementation of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to ensure the current treatment and screening backlog is caught up with and to secure sustainable and more resilient cancer care in the future.

Transforming Breast Cancer Together would like to highlight the following key points:

- TBCT supports the draft report's focus on **cancer prevention** but highlights that breastfeeding, while in some cases an effective measure, cannot be perceived as a key in addressing breast cancer. This is especially true for women who do not have children and for men who can also get breast cancer. It is important to focus both on primary and secondary prevention and therefore, genetic counselling, testing and management of BRCA carriers should be highlighted as the most effective preventive measures. For instance, prophylactic surgeries for BRCA carriers are 98% effective for the prevention of breast cancer.
- The initiative welcomes the emphasis brought to the importance of screening and implementation of **breast cancer screening** guidelines as well as highlighting the current inequalities in access to screening programmes across the EU. To further enhance EU-wide access, we would like to highlight the role of civil societies in effective cancer screening promotion, advocacy, and information campaigns.
- TBCT would like to stress the impact of **patient and civil society organisations** in underlining the existing shortcomings on the ground and advocating for the implementation of the possible solutions outlined in this draft report.
- We applaud the focus on health personnel and surgical skills training. TBCT would like to further emphasise the need for certified breast cancer surgeons and high-quality specialised care. Therefore, treatment in certified, **Specialist Breast Units/Centres** should be available across the EU Member States.
- TBCT is deeply concerned by the fact that **advanced/metastatic cancer** is mentioned solely in the context of palliative care. While this is important, therapeutic innovations have increased the survival time of advanced/metastatic cancer patients. These patients live on average between 3 and 5 years and have specific needs. As such, we urge the Committee to consider the specific needs of patients with late-stage or metastatic cancer, which are highlighted in the invisible woman [report](#).
- The initiative welcomes the increased focus on **return to work** issues and particularly, the call for the adoption of an anti-discrimination directive as well as the intention to map national employment and social protection policies to identify obstacles and the remaining challenges, which we hope will not unduly delay the action that is urgently needed in this area. In addition, the anti-discrimination directive and the Charter of Rights should cover other factors affecting the survivors' quality of life such as the long-term side-effects of treatments, cancer-related comorbidities, stress, stigmatisation, and access to quality healthcare and rehabilitation services which all have an impact on the patients' physical, mental and social wellbeing.
- TBCT supports the rapporteur's notion that **digital health technologies** are powerful tools that can help to enhance cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment as well as to enable care at home. In this sense, cross-sector and cross-country collaboration and knowledge sharing will be crucial for further enhancing the quality of cancer care in the EU.
- TBCT shares the rapporteur's view that actions in the cancer area may serve as examples for other non-communicable diseases. Similarly, to this point, the initiative would like to point out that numerous lessons could be transferred from the breast cancer area to other cancers.

TBCT would like to thank the rapporteur, her team and the BECA committee members, who worked on the draft report. We are looking forward to the next steps and discussions in the European Parliament. The initiative and its members look forward to constructively engaging with the BECA Committee and all stakeholders in supporting the successful implementation of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

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