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ECL welcomes the adoption of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, a further step in the right direction

The [Access to Medicines Task Force](#) of the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) strongly welcomes the ambitions described in [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#), key in building a strong European Health Union and in the implementation of a successful [Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe](#).

This ambitious Plan has the potential to play a key role in making the life of European citizens fighting and surviving cancer better by accelerating the quest for new, high-quality treatments and swiftly getting them, at an affordable price, to all patients who need them. **This Plan, which encapsulates “the EU's political commitment to leave no stone unturned in the fight against cancer”, is exactly what European cancer patients have been waiting for.**

Research, innovation and new digital technologies are a key component, and so is international collaboration

We are pleased to read that the European Commission is placing research, digital and data at the core of cancer-fighting efforts. The Plan recognises the importance of supporting researchers working on novel medicinal products and personalised treatment through tailored support and the creation of digital platforms to facilitate cross-border and interdisciplinary collaboration.

We look forward to the launch of a Knowledge Centre on Cancer in 2021, which will coordinate scientific and technical cancer-related initiatives at the EU level, **and hope that it will aid best practice implementation and guarantee that efforts are effective, sustainable, and coherent across the Union.**

The EU is already helping Member States improving resource allocation when it comes to cancer and the adoption of new, innovative treatments. **It is encouraging to see that the European Commission is highly motivated to push for the timely adoption of the proposal for a Regulation on Health Technology Assessment (HTA)** by the Council and the European Parliament.

A commitment to high quality cancer care and treatment in all Member States is present

The Plan gives the need to ensure access to high standards of care and treatment in all Member States the importance it deserves. ECL welcomes the clear, ambitious target of ensuring that 90% of eligible patients have access to National Comprehensive Cancer Centres by 2030 and the establishment of an EU Network linking such Cancer Centres in every Member State by 2025. **We very much hope that the Cancer Centres and the new ‘Cancer Diagnostic and Treatment for All’ initiative will improve patients’ access to the latest innovative treatments close to their homes.**

Linkages with the Pharmaceutical Strategy are important

A great deal needs to be done but Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is not a standalone plan. The recently unveiled Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe, amongst others, is complementary to the Plan. **We look forward to the targeted revision of the basic pharmaceutical legislation, as much more ambitious legislation is urgently needed to trigger the systemic changes necessary in the incentives and obligations system and drive a fundamental transition.**

In order for the Plan to create the change that patients, caregivers, and payers have long been waiting for, **actions aimed at securing supply chains, responding effectively and systematically to shortages of medicines and boosting innovation to address unmet needs would need to be as ambitious as possible.**

Health inequalities persisting across Europe are recognised

The Plan rightly identifies that EU citizens should have the same right to high quality care, diagnosis and treatment, the same access to medicines, and the same hope of survival, regardless of where they live. **ECL is pleased to see that several initiatives outlined in the Plan aim to tackle cancer inequalities and differences in relation to outcomes within and between Member States.**

Cancer leagues' key priorities going forward

ECL insists on the importance that a number of priorities, which are of particular concern to cancer patients across Europe, be taken into account going forward and when implementing the Plan:

- **Affordability, fair prices and transparency** - Medicines can help patients only when they quickly get to them. The high cost of some new therapies is a major barrier to access and, in turn, exacerbates inequalities in the EU. **ECL firmly believes that [fair prices are the key to affordability](#).** Transparency throughout the pharmaceutical system can increase the knowledge on why medicines are priced the way they are and improve the negotiating position of buyers.
- **Unmet needs** - Several cancers have high unmet needs, such as pancreatic, oesophageal and brain, and commercial development is often inefficient, as it predominantly focuses on limited therapeutic areas. **ECL strongly believes that more should be done to steer public and private R&D towards areas with limited treatment options, low survival and/or low commercial interest,** as no patient should suffer from lack of access to medicines just because their disease cannot turn into a commercial profit.
- **Patient involvement** - **Patient-centredness and participatory decision making must be at the centre of the drug development process.** Only by involving patients in the entire development process, we can ensure that new therapies add value to people battling cancer and bridge the research gap in areas of high unmet needs.

- **Independent clinical research** - Ultimately treatments should improve the overall survival and quality of life of patients. **ECL stresses the importance of involving academia and NGOs in clinical research and public access to research's results and data sets.**
- **Optimal essential medicines supply** - Due to the increasingly common shortages of cancer medicines across the EU, **ECL expects more transparency on the causes and consequences of such shortages and more cooperation between Member States to prevent putting cancer patients and their lives at risk.**

About ECL Access to Medicines Task Force

Established in 2016, the ECL Access to Medicines Task Force connects 30 national and regional cancer societies in 25 European countries, representing over 570 million Europeans. It aims to make safe and effective medicines available to all cancer patients in Europe, by insisting on accessibility, availability, affordability and increased transparency related to medicine prices, ultimately leading to sustainability of healthcare systems. The Task Force strongly believes in the power of constructive dialogue. We urge all stakeholders to push for accessibility to high quality treatments, improving both survival and the quality of life of cancer patients.

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