



Monday, 14 September 2020

Dear Distinguished Colleagues,

Ahead of the upcoming 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe we wished to convey our heartfelt thanks for the active support that European Member States have shown for the **global action plan for the elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem**, and urge Member States to continue the momentum behind the elimination movement to translate commitments into action. As a group of global and regional cancer organisations, we are delighted at the adoption of the resolution in support of the global action plan, recognising the potential to permanently alleviate the preventable mortality and suffering of women across the European Region and beyond.

We now look to the Member States of the European region to accelerate action towards the elimination of cervical cancer.¹ While it is inevitable that at the present time a political prioritisation is being given to addressing the global COVID-19 pandemic, this should not mean a vital opportunity to secure substantial success in the combat of preventable disease, such as cervical cancer, be lost. Future generations may not be forgiving of such a lost moment. We therefore urge all Member States to keep sight of the motivations which led to the global action plan and resolution, and demonstrate your commitment by investing in programmes to deliver:

- 90% coverage of HPV Vaccination of girls (by 15 years of age)
- 70% coverage of screening for cervical cancer and 90% treatment of precancerous lesions
- Management of 90% of invasive cancers

In addition to the '90-70-90' targets, European Member States have a pivotal role to play in supporting universal progress towards elimination as world-leaders in cervical cancer prevention, and as some of the more influential donors. We therefore urge Member States to ensure consistency between their national commitments to cervical cancer and the support offered to fellow Governments to vaccinate and build health system capacities for cervical cancer and other NCDs.

Looking ahead to 2030 and beyond, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has an important role to play in supporting the elimination of cervical cancer globally and we welcome the commitment to appoint an ambassador to work closely with partners, such as the European Union. We note with great concern, however, the draft WHO European Programme of Work (2020-2025) consulted upon over the summer does not highlight the elimination effort as a unifying endeavour to which the WHO Regional Office for Europe could contribute significantly. We call for this to be urgently rectified in the final draft programme. Now is a time for Europe to show leadership to the world in how inter-governmental cooperation on health can achieve inspiring success.

¹ Arbyn, M, Gultekin, M, Morice, P, et al. The European response to the WHO call to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem. *Int. J. Cancer.* 2020; 1– 8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijc.33189>

The greatest tragedy would be to emerge from this period with continuing inequities in the burden and survival amongst the 69,000 women diagnosed with cervical cancer across the European region each year². The European region includes some world leaders in cervical cancer prevention³ and the global strategy provides a clear roadmap for actions which provide cost-effective and feasible investments, which in turn will support and build the resilience of health systems. We have seen the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reduced cancer diagnosis and impaired access treatment and care, and urgent action is needed to minimise the impact of deferred screening, diagnosis and treatment, as well as increased hesitancy amongst the general public to utilise services in the midst of a pandemic.⁴

As civil society organisations we stand ready as to support the development and implementation of these national commitments, contributing our expertise and networks to support improvements in cancer prevention and control across the region.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Wendy Yared, Director, Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

Mr Richard Price, EU Affairs Policy Manager, European Cancer Organisation

Dr Katherine Irene Pettus, Advocacy Officer, International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care

Ms Ingrid Stenstadvold Ross, Secretary-general, Norwegian Cancer Society

Prof. Marc Arbyn, Coordinator Cancer Epidemiology unit, Belgian Cancer Centre, Sciensano

Ms Ulrika Arehed Kagström, Secretary-general, Swedish Cancer Society

Dr Cary Adams, Chief Executive Officer, Union for International Cancer Control

Dr Kate Allen, Executive Director, Science and Public Affairs, World Cancer Research Fund International

² International Agency for Research on Cancer (2018) <https://gco.iarc.fr/today/data/factsheets/populations/994-who-europe-region-euro-fact-sheets.pdf> Arbyn M, Weiderpass E, Bruni L, de SS, Saraiya M, Ferlay J et al. Estimates of incidence and mortality of cervical cancer in 2018: a worldwide analysis. *Lancet Glob Health* 2020; 8: e191-e120.

³ Cancer Prevention Policy Atlas (2020) https://www.epfweb.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/hpv_atlas_en_2020_v8-lores_final.pdf

⁴ 1. Arbyn M, Bruni L, Kelly D, Basu P, Poljak M, Gultekin M, et al. Tackling cervical cancer in Europe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic [Internet]. *Lancet Public Heal*. Elsevier Ltd; 2020 [cited 2020 Sep 11]. p. e425.