

ECL First Screening Workshop

Hosted by the Romanian Cancer Society and national partners

Promoting and embedding the European Code Against Cancer within Screening Programmes:

current status and future perspectives

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BACKGROUND

The recommendation “take part in organised screening (for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer)” is included one of twelve evidence-based messages of the European Code against Cancer (ECAC). The current edition of ECAC advises that the more recommendations people follow, the lower their risk of cancer will be. It has been estimated that up to 50% of the cancer mortality could potentially be avoided if everyone followed the recommendations of the ECAC.

As a possible “teachable moment” for motivating behaviour change towards adopting healthier lifestyles and practices, organised cancer screening programmes have an important role to play in delivering the prevention messages outlined in the ECAC to people invited for screening. Yet, despite possible gains for public health, appreciating what are the effective strategies for aligning primary cancer prevention recommendations from the ECAC with secondary prevention remains an area in need of further investigation.

In collaboration with the Centre for Epidemiology and Prevention in Oncology, Piedmont (CPO), and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) convened a multidisciplinary workshop to address this issue by exploring the available evidence on the integration of health promotion and primary prevention into cancer screening programmes.

Hosted by the National Institute of Public Health for Romania and the Romanian Cancer Society, the workshop brought together a diverse range of participants from twelve countries, and a broad cross-section of experts and stakeholders engaged with primary and secondary cancer prevention in Romania.



Centro di Riferimento per l'Epidemiologia
e la Prevenzione Oncologica in Piemonte



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WORKSHOP STATEMENT

Following two days of intensive discussion, workshop participants concluded:

- Current evidence regarding the health benefits of integrating primary prevention into screening programmes is encouraging. Primary prevention interventions implemented in the cancer screening setting, aiming to promote the adoption of healthier lifestyle, are well accepted and may favour behavioural change;
- Embedding primary prevention interventions into the screening setting can act as a positive counterpoint to the “certificate of health” effect that can occur within screening participation;
- Aligning the practical implementation of primary and secondary prevention programmes can encourage greater interdisciplinary working and may provide training and educational opportunities for the screening workforce.

For the next steps to be taken to move this issue forward, participants noted the following key messages:

- As a key research priority, national and European policymakers should support the development of pilot projects aimed to assess organisational impact, sustainability and long-term effect of these interventions;
- It is essential that all interventions are cost-effective and consistent with the recommendations of the 4th edition of the European Code against Cancer;
- When implementing screening programmes, national and regional screening programme managers should assess the opportunity to directly introduce services related to primary prevention themes, as laid out in ECAC;
- At national and regional level, developing networks involving NGOs, clinical and primary care services may represent an effective approach to achieve integration of primary and secondary cancer prevention;
- The EU Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases represents a suitable platform to gather examples of research and practice, valorise results and spread best practice internationally. The steering group should consider how it can support the direct introduction of primary prevention services into screening programmes.

The outcomes of the workshop will be followed up through close cooperation between ECL, CPO and IARC, and will include all interested stakeholders. Information will be regularly posted on the ECL website section dedicated to cancer screening, which will be fully operational in September.

For any enquiries, please contact the ECL secretariat at ECL@european-cancer-leagues.org.