

PRESS RELEASE

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Lack of Awareness is a Major Barrier to Early Cancer Detection

Budapest, 20 May 2019 - Cancer experts across Europe declare that there are still significant barriers to detecting cancer early. Over 150 experts from over 30 countries responded to the survey of the EU co-funded Joint Action iPAAC (innovative Partnership for Action Against Cancer). The results were announced in Budapest today.

Lack of awareness was identified as an important barrier to the early diagnosis of cancer. But the recognition of symptoms is not enough. Other issues are delays, access to primary care and socioeconomic inequalities. Early detection can also produce more harm than benefit, so more knowledge is needed to avoid unnecessary medical treatments.

The iPAAC survey explored some of the most common cancers in Europe: breast, prostate, skin and oral cancers. Six barriers in the survey ranged from lack of evidence to cancer stigma and poorly organized patient path.

The most common cancer among women in Europe is breast cancer, yet women are unfamiliar with the diverse early symptoms. The need is therefore urgent for better information and on the advantages of early detection.

Among men, prostate is among the most common cancers, but unfortunately, it is very difficult to detect early. There are no clear warning signs for aggressive types of prostate cancer and more research is needed. The lack of evidence was also very high among barriers mentioned.

Unequal access to primary care is another major barrier. There are populations who cannot afford to seek health care services, or cannot travel the distances required. It may also be that services simply do not exist.

The results of the European survey will be discussed at an international expert meeting today in Budapest. For Hungary, the focus will be especially on head and neck cancers. More than 60 experts are attending this meeting to advance European cancer control. They represent governmental agencies, health ministries, European societies, health care professionals, research institutes and patient advocacy organisations.



The aim of the meeting is to prioritize the most important findings of the survey for European policy-makers. There will be another conference in December 2019 in Helsinki about screening programmes where early detection will be tackled at the population level. Currently, EU recommends three population-based screening programmes: cervical, colorectal and breast cancer.

The iPAAC conference is organized by the Hungarian Institute of Oncology, the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Cancer Society of Finland.

iPAAC is a consortium of 44 organisations from 24 countries. This EU Joint Action is led by the Slovenian Institute of Public Health. It will run until April 2021. More on the Joint Action is at www.ipaac.eu and [@ipaac_project](https://twitter.com/ipaac_project) on Twitter.

For more information: Dr. Clarissa Bingham, Clarissa.Bingham@cancer.fi

Annex: FACT SHEET: Main findings from the survey



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1. Early diagnosis relates to **the recognition of symptomatic cancer** in patients (definition source WHO)
2. The objective is to identify cancer at the earliest possible opportunity and the link to diagnosis and treatment without delay. When done promptly, cancer may be detected at a potentially curable stage, improving survival and quality of life.
3. For prostate cancer, the most important barrier is lack of evidence. There are no clear signs for early detection.
4. For breast cancer, the most important barrier to early diagnosis is lack of awareness.
5. At the patient-level, financial reasons are the most important barrier to the early diagnosis of oral cancers.
6. For skin cancer, the main barrier to early diagnosis is lack of awareness.
7. For most cancers, lack of awareness is still the most important barrier in Europe, experts say.
8. Cancer stigma does not play the most important role as a barrier to early diagnosis in Europe, experts estimate.
9. For both breast and prostate cancers, poor patient pathway is an important barrier to early diagnosis in Europe.
10. Limited access to primary care produces inequity in European cancer control.
11. New information of diagnosing cancer early: several significant barriers still exist.
12. The European survey examined four cancer types (oral, skin, breast and prostate), and found variations according to cancer types found in early diagnosis.

Source: Survey on perceptions of attitudes of barriers to early detection, iPAAC Joint Action, May 20, 2019

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