



European Commission - Speech
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Remarks by Commissioner Stella Kyriakides at the press conference on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

Brussels, 3 February 2021

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am truly honoured to welcome you to the launch of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. It is a Plan that is being presented in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic, but also gives hope for cancer patients, their families, and European citizens.

Exactly one year ago, we began a journey in the European Parliament, shoulder to shoulder with cancer patients, scientists, medical professionals, advocates, partners from across the EU with President von der Leyen, Vice-President Schinas and MEPs.

Together, we took the first steps towards a new EU approach to cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care.

And today, after 12 months of consultation, of listening, and of learning, we mark another important step on that journey.

A journey that, if I may be allowed to share with you, is about making the personal experience political. We are all aware that in many Member States, there is a lack of information, inequality in access to care, and a stigma and fear associated with this disease, and with the word "cancer". For us, it was important to do more and different.

Vice-President Schinas and I are truly privileged to be in a position to have an impact on the lives of so many Europeans.

This year finds us in the middle of a global pandemic. And this has of course impacted on the lives of cancer patients. 2.7 million people diagnosed with cancer in the EU last year, while 1.3 million Europeans lost their lives. Speaking with stakeholders and patient organisations in the past year, many cancer patients have not had access to their treatments on time, and many citizens have not had access to screening programmes. This has resulted in a decrease of cancer diagnosis, which reflects a very worrying situation.

We need to be very clear - unless we take urgent, decisive and far-reaching action, more and more Europeans will be diagnosed with cancer. More and more lives will be turned upside down. More and more families and loved ones will face trauma, heartache and loss.

Starting today, with the launch of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, we are striving to make a difference to this in the future. This Plan will have a concrete impact on cancer care over the coming years, and it prioritises the wellbeing of patients, their families and all our citizens, every step of the way.

This is a Plan about hope and resilience. It is about action.

With this Plan, we aim to prevent the preventable – we must remember that up to 40% of all cancer cases are avoidable. We will address key risk factors, not only smoking or harmful alcohol consumption, but also obesity, diets, lack of physical activity, exposure to pollution or carcinogenic substances and infections.

We aim to eliminate cancers caused by human papillomaviruses. We are proposing EU support for Member States on vaccination, and aim to vaccinate at least 90% of the EU target population of girls and to significantly increase the vaccination of boys by 2030.

We will create a 'Tobacco-Free Generation', where less than 5% of the population uses tobacco by 2040, compared to around 25% today.

We will look at promoting healthier diets, reducing carcinogenic contaminants in food, nutrition labelling, and marketing of unhealthy food products. We are also proposing mandatory labelling of ingredients and nutrient content, along with health warnings on alcoholic beverages.

Early detection through screening offers the best chance of beating cancer and saving lives. So we

will take action to screen more, and to screen better.

We will ensure that screening programmes are up to date with the latest scientific evidence, and consider extending targeted screening also to prostate, lung and gastric cancer.

Our actions aim to raise the standard of cancer care.

By 2025, we will establish an EU Network linking recognised National Comprehensive Cancer Centres in every Member State to improve access to high-quality diagnosis and care.

But to make good on our ambitions, we also need a workforce that can deliver. This year, we will launch 'Inter-specialty cancer training programme' to address skills gaps and support cross-border training.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The number of cancer survivors is growing every year, and is now estimated at over 12 million in Europe. We need to prioritise their wellbeing and this is what we address in this Plan.

We aim to ensure that patients not only survive their illness, but that they also live long, fulfilling lives, free from discrimination and unfair obstacles.

By 2023, we will launch the 'Better Life for Cancer Patients Initiative', focusing on follow-up care. We will look at return to work, social integration, and practices in the financial sector that can lead to unfairness on health grounds.

We want to ensure that all cancer patients have the same chance of survival and access to care wherever they live in the EU.

It is unacceptable that today, we have different access to prevention programmes across the EU. There are different rates for early detection, diagnosis, treatment, and survival. We need to have a European Union that represents all of its citizens equally.

We will launch a 'Cancer Inequalities Registry' to identify differences between Member States and regions by 2022 – so that we can better direct our support.

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan will also shine a spotlight on childhood cancers. We need to address this recognising the different diagnostic, therapeutic and psychosocial needs of children and adolescents.

For this reason, later this year, we will launch the 'Helping Children with Cancer Initiative' to ensure that children have access to rapid and optimal detection, diagnosis, treatment and care.

EU citizens deserve to live in a society that protects them from avoidable cancers, and that ensures early detection. A society that provides equitable, affordable, high-quality and sustainable cancer care to those who need it – regardless of where they live in the Union.

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is our ambitious, concrete and collective response to that demand.

It is not a guaranteed solution. It reflects a political commitment by the Commission to leave no stone unturned in our efforts against cancer.

Its success will come from genuine partnerships and collaboration.

I look forward to upcoming discussions with Member States, the European Parliament, and indeed with cancer advocates across the EU to make this a reality.

I will be asking them – just as I am asking you – to join me on this journey, to walk this path, and to help turn this concrete ambition into concrete action.

Thank you.

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