

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan brings hope for better prostate cancer outcomes

We warmly welcome today's launch of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan by the European Commission, in particular the planned activities under early detection. The Commission aims to propose an update on the European Council's Recommendation on cancer screening by 2022, including the potential addition of new cancers such as prostate cancer.

This gives the EU a unique opportunity to tackle the current unacceptable rise in mortality rates and 'too late' diagnoses of prostate cancer while avoiding the overdiagnosis and overtreatment challenges of the past and assuring the best possible quality of life for patients. If Europe's Beating Cancer Plan can harmonise an approach across the EU with regards to early detection of prostate cancer, we believe this will not only decrease mortality from prostate cancer, but also support EU member states to sort out the current mess of opportunistic testing for prostate cancer. Opportunistic testing has proven to be ineffective, with only a small mortality reduction and a considerable risk of overdiagnosis. The co-signatories of this statement stand prepared to work with the Commission to provide scientific evidence and guidance on a clear and strategic approach to early detection of prostate cancer throughout Europe.

This welcome announcement, coupled with the EU Cancer research mission which will generate evidence on the optimisation of existing population-based cancer screening programmes, develop novel approaches for screening and early detection, and provide options to extend screening to new cancers, could unlock a new era of better outcomes for prostate cancer patients.

We also believe that the creation of National Comprehensive Cancer Centres and inter-specialty training programmes (for oncology, surgery, and radiotherapy) are promising steps towards a more effective and holistic diagnostic and treatment package for cancer patients across the EU.

The European Association of Urology (EAU) leads the academic consortium of the IMI's Big Data for Better Outcomes programme on prostate cancer, which is three years into a five-year programme of creating a federated platform which can support necessary research. We are certain that this can contribute to several initiatives addressed in Europe's Beating Cancer Plan: the Knowledge Centre on Cancer, the European Initiative to Understand Cancer (UNCAN.eu), the European Cancer Imaging Initiative, and the broader European health data space to support research and innovation on prostate cancer.

A growing challenge from prostate cancer

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is published as Europe is facing a growing challenge from prostate cancer, which is the most diagnosed male cancer and the second leading cause of male cancer death. Every year, around 450,000 European men are diagnosed with prostate cancer, the majority of which too late and in a metastatic phase, with over 2 million men across the EU now living with the disease.

Prostate cancer is a chronic disease that causes many emotional and social problems for patients, who can suffer stigma and discrimination, and their families. Advanced prostate cancer is also a challenging and costly condition for public health systems to manage. On top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic is hitting the same demographics as prostate cancer disproportionately hard: older men, especially those from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Now is the time to change the outcomes for men across Europe.

Quotes:

Andre Deschamps, Europa Uomo Chairman:

“Reading the latest scientific information and data on quality of life, there is no excuse left for politicians to not support early detection of prostate cancer. If they do not, they will be responsible for more prostate cancer deaths and an unnecessary loss of quality of life.”

Prof. Monique Roobol, European Randomised Study for the Screening of Prostate Cancer:

“Joining forces, a better understanding, awareness, and a physician-patient interaction will lead to improved health outcomes, enhanced quality of life, and a delivery of more appropriate and cost-effective services.”

Prof. Hendrik van Poppel, European Association of Urology:

"A clearly defined risk-stratified early detection strategy for prostate cancer will not only decrease overdiagnosis and overtreatment, but will also dramatically improve the quality of life of our patients by detecting the disease at an early, curable stage."

Ken Mastris, ECPC President:

“As the largest European cancer patient association, we truly welcome the holistic approach of the new Cancer Plan. There is immense opportunity to reduce the cancer burden in Europe through cancer prevention, early diagnosis, accessible treatment, available innovative medicine and post-cancer care. Together, we can defeat cancer in Europe and ECPC is committed to support the implementation of the Plan.”

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