



EUROPEAN ACADEMY  
OF CANCER SCIENCES



## “A MISSION-ORIENTED APPROACH TO CANCER IN EUROPE: BOOSTING THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF INNOVATIVE CANCER RESEARCH”

A conference jointly organised by the European Academy of Cancer Sciences  
and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, The Vatican, November 16-17

Cancer is a staggering challenge with major impact on society, healthcare systems, the economy as well as an increasing number of patients and their families. At present, there are 4,23 million new cancer patients in Europe annually, 1,94 million deaths, as well as a rising number of patients living with a cancer diagnosis. To help meet this human and societal challenge the European Commission has recently proposed a mission-oriented approach to cancer in Horizon Europe; fighting cancer using a mission approach is likely to change the lives of many families across Europe and beyond.

About 60 participants (researchers, clinicians, policy makers, diplomats, representatives of cancer leagues and patient organisations), met at the Vatican to discuss a “A mission-oriented approach to cancer in Europe: a joint mission/vision 2030”. The mission is rooted in the efforts of both the European cancer community and the European Commission during the last 16 years to address the fragmentation and lack of coordination of European cancer research. These efforts resulted in the creation of a pan-European platform/infrastructure for translational cancer research composed of interlinked cancer research centres with shared infrastructures and collaborative projects to facilitate rapid advances in knowledge, and their translation into better cancer treatment, care and prevention.

The following conclusions were reached:

- The current negative trend of an increasing cancer burden can only be reversed by giving priority to excellence in research, the engine that fuels innovation in both therapeutic and prevention activities.
- Comprehensive Cancer Centres (CCCs), entities that link research and education with prevention and treatment, are considered essential to catalyze this process as they connect research with the healthcare systems and integrate every step in the cancer research-care continuum from basic/preclinical, to early clinical, late clinical, and outcomes research.
- Accreditation methodologies for quality assurance both of multidisciplinary care and research are already validated and should be further supported to be more broadly implemented and continually improved. These accreditation schema are fundamental for spreading and objectively evaluating innovations and provide the basis for health economics assessment.
- Prevention complements advances in treatment and care. It is estimated that around 40% of cancers could be prevented, if current knowledge about cancer risk factors was better translated into primary prevention strategies. Cancer screening and other types of early detection can further reduce the incidence of cancer and improve survival through more effective treatment of early stage disease.

- Cancer is characterized by inequalities in outcomes between countries and between population groups within countries, reflecting difference in access to prevention, early detection, treatment and care. It is important that all cancer control initiatives are designed to “leave no-one behind”.
- Closely collaborating consortia of cancer research centres and research networks are required to achieve the critical mass of resources, expertise, and patients required for innovation. All EU countries must have mechanisms to participate, associate with and benefit from these networks.
- The balance between public and private funding of clinical and translational research should shift more towards public funding, in particular of clinical trials across Europe. The support for prevention research from public funding needs to be substantially increased.
- A mission on cancer is linked to important policy questions that must be expressed in political terms. The role of diplomacy to achieve an effective “Cancer Mission” both within the EU and in the context of “open to the world” was discussed, the latter with very positive support from representatives of other continents.
- The European Commission recently suggested restricting the cancer mission to paediatric oncology. The Conference, however, concluded that as cancer is predominantly a disease of aging, focusing on the 0,6% of all cancer patients in the 0-19 year age group will severely compromise the scientific, social and economic impact of a mission. Moreover a mission limited to paediatric oncology would not address research in prevention and early detection, which are of fundamental importance to make progress against cancer overall. Paediatric oncology should, however, be an essential component of a mission covering all cancers.
- The conference at the Vatican, jointly organized between the European Academy of Cancer Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Cancer Sciences, conveys an important symbolic message linked to ethics, social justice and human rights by emphasizing our obligation as a cancer research community to reduce the suffering from cancer by giving priority to research in cancer prevention and effective treatments, this to the benefit of all citizens in Europe.

*“It is important to join forces in order to implement policies that ensure, at affordable costs, the provision of medicines essential for the survival of those in need, without neglecting the area of research & the development of treatments that, albeit not financially profitable, are essential for saving human lives.”*

Pope Francis’ Speech to the Diplomatic Corps, 8 January 2018

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