

5 December 2017, Brussels

To: Minister of Health  
Cc: Health Attaché, Permanent Representation to the EU

**Subject: Transparency in pricing is the first key step toward equal access to medicines and the sustainability of healthcare systems**

Dear Minister,

We, the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), a non-profit organisation representing 26 national and regional cancer societies, wish to express our grave concern about the rising costs of innovative medicines, creating obstacles for equal access to treatment for all patients in the EU.

We are convinced that transparency in pricing of medicines is a key aspect of cost containment in the healthcare spending. Therefore, we urge the health ministers to push for transparency and inter-governmental knowledge exchange revealing list prices of medicines in different EU countries, in order to empower governments/payers to have a stronger position in the price negotiations. We also encourage Member States to join efforts and support initiatives such as *BeNeLuxA* and the *Valletta Declaration*, to boost cooperation in price negotiations and joint procurement procedures.

Ahead of the **Health Council meeting on 8 December 2017**, we would like you to consider the following remarks:

1. The growth in prices of anticancer medicines is expected to exceed the growth in total cancer spending. From 2010 to 2020, total expenditure is estimated to increase by 26%, while expenditure on anticancer drugs is expected to rise by 50%.<sup>1</sup>
2. Prices are rising faster than the benefit they bring. The *British Medical Journal* study published in October 2017 analysed the efficacy of 48 new cancer treatments approved by the EMA between 2009 and 2013, finding only 35% resulted in prolonged survival ranging from 1 to 5.8 months (2.7 median) and only 10% showed improvement in the quality of life at the time of market approval.<sup>2</sup>
3. Information asymmetry and the lack of transparency lead to inefficient price negotiations, thus blurring the definition of 'fair pricing' and compromising efficient healthcare spending. Negotiations as well as achieved discounts are kept confidential between the pharmaceutical company and the authorities, leading to great variations in the price-setting of cancer drugs in different European countries.<sup>3</sup> This information asymmetry arises when the industry knows medicines prices in all countries, but the national agencies do not have access to such data beyond their borders. Hence the pharmaceutical industry is left with a dominant position in the price negotiations. Moreover, lower-income countries often end up paying higher prices than governments which are better equipped to negotiate higher discounts.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, we believe that transparency in pricing and knowledge-exchange between payers is the first key step ultimately leading toward affordable prices and equal access to medicines for all patients in Europe.

Yours Sincerely,



Sakari Karjalainen  
ECL President



Eveline Scheres  
Chair, ECL Access to Medicines Task Force

<sup>1</sup> Vinay Prasad, Kevin De Jesús and Sham Mailankody, 'The high price of anticancer drugs: origins, implications, barriers, solutions', *Nature Reviews Clinical Oncology* vol. 14 (2017), p. 381–390.

<sup>2</sup> Courtney Davis, et al., 'Availability of evidence of benefits on overall survival and quality of life of cancer drugs approved by European Medicines Agency: retrospective cohort study of drug approvals 2009-13', *BMJ* vol. 359 (2017), p. 1-15.

<sup>3</sup> Sabine Vogler, Agnes Vitry and Zaheer-Ud-Din Babar, 'Cancer drugs in 16 European countries, Australia, and New Zealand: a cross-country price comparison study', *The Lancet Oncology*, vol. 17(1), (2016), p. 39-47.

<sup>4</sup> Wim van Harten et al., 'Actual costs of cancer drugs in 15 European countries'. *The Lancet Oncology*, vol. 17(1) (2016), p. 18-20.

## ANNEX

### List of supporting organisations

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|    | Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)          |
|    | Cancer Focus Northern Ireland                         |
|    | Cancer Foundation, Luxembourg                         |
|    | Cancer Society of Finland                             |
|    | Catalan Federation Against Cancer (FECEC)             |
|    | Danish Cancer Society                                 |
|   | Dutch Cancer Society                                  |
|  | Hungarian League Against Cancer                       |
|  | Irish Cancer Society                                  |
|  | League Against Cancer, France                         |
|  | Portuguese League Against Cancer                      |
|  | Polish Cancer League                                  |
|  | Romanian Cancer Society                               |
|  | Stand up to Cancer, Flanders                          |
|  | The Cyprus Anti-Cancer Society                        |
|  | The Cyprus Association of Cancer Patients and Friends |