

JOINT STATEMENT

Proposal to measure awareness of the European Code Against Cancer

Achieving the health literacy goals of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

Following a [webinar on "Measuring awareness of the ECAC"](#) held in February 2022, the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), the French National Cancer Institute (INCa), and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) **call for the European Commission to commit to a thorough, robust and systematic evaluation of the European Code against Cancer (ECAC)**, which would be best served by the implementation of a **Eurobarometer survey** instrument to be conducted by 2024.

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP)¹ demonstrates the political commitment of the European Union (EU) to diminish greatly the negative impact of cancer on society. Across four key areas – prevention, early detection, treatment, and improving quality of life – the European Commission proposes dozens of actions to address the painful burden of cancer in Europe.

A major priority amongst these multiple actions is the commitment to **update and boost the implementation of the ECAC**. The implementation roadmap of the EBCP, updated in January 2022, states that the progress indicator to measure the success of this priority area is the "*percentage of the population being aware of more than half of the code's recommendations*".² The selection of this progress indicator raises the important question of *how* and *what* shall be measured?

Regarding the methodology to measure the awareness of the ECAC messages, the *Joint Signatories* draw attention to the instrument of the **Eurobarometer survey**, which has been used on previous occasions – in 1989^{3,4} and 1998⁵ - to measure attitudes towards and awareness of cancer prevention and the ECAC. The Eurobarometer provides a well-established and trusted source of knowledge about public opinion in the European Union and can be implemented typically in several forms: standard, special, or flash.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union/cancer-plan-europe_en

² https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-01/2021-2025_cancer-roadmap1_en_0.pdf

³ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/100>

⁴ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/102>

⁵ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/174>

Considering the high political priority that cancer control has been afforded by the current Commission, the *Joint Signatories* call for the development and implementation of a Eurobarometer survey to determine the awareness of the ECAC messages in a representative sample across the EU to be performed by 2024.

Regarding the content of the proposed Eurobarometer survey, the *Joint Signatories* encourage the Commission to draw inspiration from national surveys on cancer awareness such as the **Baromètre Cancer**⁶ in France, which has been conducted since 2005 to better understand the opinions, knowledge and habits of the French population concerning cancer and its prevention. Other EU member states – notably Spain⁷ and Belgium⁸ – have also performed such surveys routinely. Therefore, EU added-value can be achieved by bringing together the knowledge and know-how from such examples of national good practice to inform the methodology of an EU-wide survey instrument composed of relevant, evidence-based survey items.

The *Joint Signatories* also call on the European Commission to follow the **recommendations** on the future of the ECAC published during the **Innovative Partnership for Action Against Cancer (iPAAC) Joint Action**.⁹ In particular, we draw attention to the recommendation to establish a framework and governance structure for the evaluation of the implementation of the ECAC. This necessitates the commitment to a continual process of monitoring and evaluation beyond the proposed Eurobarometer survey, which could become a routine and recurring instrument to serve the long-term evaluation of the impact of the ECAC.

Lastly, the *Joint Signatories* urge the Commission to take heed of the **viewpoint of Cancer Leagues in Europe**¹⁰ – as the primary promoters of the ECAC to the general public – who have advocated strongly for the ECAC to be used also as an advocacy tool to inform cancer prevention policies. Consequently, the ECAC's impact should not be limited to measuring the awareness and attitudes of the general population alone but must consider its real-world application as a basis for informing population-level actions.¹¹ This element should, therefore, be factored into the broader framework to evaluate the ECAC in complementarity to the proposed method of the Eurobarometer survey to measure awareness of the ECAC messages.

⁶ <https://www.e-cancer.fr/Comprendre-prevenir-depister/Reduire-les-risques-de-cancer/Barometre-Cancer>

⁷ <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph181910472>

⁸ https://www.kanker.be/sites/default/files/stk_kankerbarometer_2021.pdf

⁹ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.canep.2021.101933>

¹⁰ <https://www.cancer.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECL-viewpoint-update-ECAC-Nov-2021.pdf>

¹¹ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.canep.2021.101898>