



## Cancer Leagues celebrated 40 years of reducing the impact of cancer on the lives of Europeans

10 November 2020

### Contact

[ecl@europeancancerleagues.org](mailto:ecl@europeancancerleagues.org)  
[www.cancer.eu](http://www.cancer.eu)

*Brussels* - Members of the *Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)*, invited experts and stakeholders from the cancer community from 35 countries gathered online to discuss the achievements and future challenges of cancer prevention and control in Europe.

ECL's 2020 annual conference was held online and exceptionally opened to all stakeholders to celebrate its **40th anniversary** of service to cancer societies across Europe, the winner of the first ever **ECL Honorary Award** as well as the countdown to the announcement of **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**.

**ECL**, a network of national and regional cancer leagues from all over Europe, **celebrated 40 years of actions to reduce the impact of cancer on people's lives**. Founded in 1980 in Rome by 14 prominent leagues and 21 well-known cancer experts, ECL launched its statutes for the fight against a disease that was considered a death sentence at the time. **Cancer knows no borders and is relentless. And so has been cancer leagues' collective determination to fight it.**

In the 1980s, it was projected that cancer mortality would continue to rise beyond the year 2000. **Today**, not only have mortality rates declined, **we have sufficient knowledge to prevent close to half of all cancers. Due in part to the work of ECL and its members, scientific findings got translated into concrete actions. What seemed impossible is now a reality.**



ECL opened the online conference with a welcome speech from its President. **Dr Sakari Karjalainen, President of ECL**, highlighted: **'Cancer leagues are the main resource for the public for cancer control information and services.** Sharing the ambition of eliminating cancer, nothing less is good enough for us, them and the citizens, patients, survivors and caregivers we serve. The ECL network has empowered cancer leagues across Europe to accelerate cancer prevention and actions to support patients and their loved ones. **In 40 years of existence, ECL has grown in achievements and leadership.** ECL's eminent status in cancer control in Europe today is due to the successful collaboration with others, such as the WHO, IARC, the EU Commission, the EU Parliament and other committed civil society organisations.'



Dr Sakari Karjalainen, President of the Association of European Cancer Leagues, added: *'Co-funding from the European Commission has enabled ECL to intensify its work, especially in influencing policy, raising awareness of prevention through the European Code Against Cancer, encouraging Youth Ambassadors to improve dissemination among young people, and enhancing networking opportunities for leagues to share best practices and collaborate more efficiently, especially to reduce inequalities.* **On this 40th anniversary, ECL calls on all to join the dedicated efforts of cancer leagues.** Our impact on cancer control and good reputation are very much based on the strong influence of cancer leagues all over Europe. **Together, we can make beating cancer a Mission Possible.'**

Dr Karjalainen took the opportunity to also announce and congratulate the **first ever winner of the new ECL Honorary Award - Dr Donald Maxell (Max) Parkin.**



Dr Max Parkin, Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the Nuffield Department of Population Health of the University of Oxford, accepted the award and stated: ***'I sincerely thank the ECL for this award in recognition of my work with cancer registries, and prevention-related research in Europe.*** Much of this was through the European Network of Cancer Registries (ENCR), a project established in 1989 within the framework of the Europe against Cancer Programme of the European Commission, jointly by cancer registry associations in Europe, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). The secretariat was provided by the section at IARC of which I was head until 2004, but I

continued to serve on the Steering Committee until 2012. ENCR played a major role in developing cancer registration in the continent through setting standards, training and advocacy, as well as ensuring a constant update of statistical information on the cancer burden in Europe. The support from the EU to this organisation had a wider influence too, since much of the work done in these domains was translatable to other parts of the world, where cancer registration was not so fortunate in receiving recognition and financial support. Thus, ***although I must thank Europe (including the Cancer Leagues that have consistently supported their national cancer registries), for the support in cancer surveillance and control, I would like to note the benefits that this has conferred in combatting the cancer epidemic worldwide.'***



**The 2020 ECL Conference also put a spotlight on cancer prevention research, opportunities and challenges.** Significant progress has been made in the last 50 years, transforming the prospects for people diagnosed with cancer. Research has led to an improved understanding of the biology and causes of cancer. This in turn has led to discovering better ways to prevent, diagnose and treat the disease - all helping to save lives. However, there is still a long way to go.



**Dr Elisabete Weiderpass**, Director of the the WHO specialized agency in cancer research, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), touched upon the broad issue of the growing cancer burden in the European region. **Dr Weiderpass emphasised prevention was the most cost-effective, long-term strategy we currently have for cancer control.** Indeed, up to 40% of all cancers are preventable if effective preventive programmes are implemented. The European region, with around 9% of the world's population, has a 25% share of the global cancer burden. She stated: **'Against the backdrop of a rising cancer burden, national policies and programmes should be strengthened to raise awareness, to reduce exposure to cancer risk factors, to increase early detection and HPV and hepatitis B vaccination programmes and to ensure that people are provided with the information and support they need to adopt healthy choices'**.

**The conference also saw the participation of the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.**

Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, stated: **'Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is a top priority for the Commission.** Europe has a quarter of all cancer cases but less than 10% of the world's population. If we do not act swiftly the suffering caused by this disease will increase as will the burden on national health care and social protection systems. Many policy areas in this Plan will be making important contributions to ensure that we address cancer in a holistic way as possible. **With the Cancer Plan, Europe is embarking on a journey to improve the life of cancer patients and families across the EU, and European and national cancer organisations will be our close partners in this process. Together we can make a difference.'**



## NOTES TO EDITORS

### **About the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)**

ECL provides a unique platform as the only non-profit, pan-European umbrella organisation with the mission of uniting, at the European level, national and regional cancer leagues to achieve a cancer-free Europe. Active since 1980 and located in Brussels, ECL currently has 29 members from 24 countries in the European Region, covering 21 EU member states. ECL's members are cancer charities operating across the whole portfolio - from cancer research and awareness to patient support during and after diagnosis. Cancer leagues are often the main resource for the public for cancer control information and services. ECL's mission is to influence and improve cancer control and cancer care in Europe. This is done by providing a forum and voice for experienced charities and supporting new entrants facilitating collaboration and knowledge sharing, primarily in the areas of cancer prevention, tobacco control, access to medicines and patient support, as well as creating opportunities to advocate for these issues at the EU level. ECL also collaborates with global and European institutions, other NGOs and research institutes. For further information about ECL, please visit [cancer.eu](https://cancer.eu) and follow @CancerLeagues on   

