



Celebrating 40 years of reducing the impact of cancer on people's lives

The Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), a network of national and regional cancer leagues all over Europe, is celebrating 40 years of actions to reduce the impact of cancer. It was founded in Rome by 14 prominent leagues and 21 well-known cancer experts in 1980, to fight against a disease that was considered a death sentence at the time. Cancer knows no borders and is relentless. And so has been our collective determination to fight it.

In the 1980s, cancer mortality was projected to rise beyond the year 2000. Today, not only have mortality rates in Europe declined, but we have sufficient knowledge to prevent half of all cancers. Our members have helped translate scientific findings into concrete actions. What seemed impossible is now a reality.

ECL members are the main public resource for cancer control information and services. Sharing the ambition of eliminating cancer, nothing less is good enough for us or for the citizens, patients and survivors we serve. The ECL network has empowered cancer leagues to accelerate cancer research 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 successful collaboration, including with the World Health Organization, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the European Commission, the European Parliament and others.

Co-funding from the European Union has enabled ECL to intensify our 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 practice and collaborate more efficiently, especially to reduce health inequalities.

The Future

In the next 40 years, we seek to put ourselves out of business. Our vision is nothing less than a future without cancer. To

some this will sound utopian. How can we aim for a cancer-free Europe when experts are predicting that more people will be diagnosed with cancer because we are living longer, and cancer is an age-related set of diseases?

While we do not have all the answers, the following considerations will be key:

- Prevention is the best cure.
- A more robust approach to research on innovative cancer prevention and treatment solutions is needed.
- Cancer is a health inequality issue that cannot be resolved by the health sector alone.
- A substantial amount of data and expertise is available across the continent; we must collaborate to make the most of these tools.

Our major projects for this anniversary year are to:

- encourage countries to step up tobacco control efforts such as outlined in the new tobacco control country ranking report (www.tobaccocontrolscale.org)
- ensure that EU policies and the regulatory environment support collaboration across the cancer community and strengthen the role of representative organisations, such as the ECL
- shape the #EUCancerPlan and Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 3.4.

Call to Action

On this 40th anniversary, ECL calls on everyone to join the dedicated efforts of cancer leagues. As the European Commissioner Kyriakides said at a conference on Better Access to Cancer Treatment, in December 2019, "We don't have to look too far for inspiration. The European Cancer Leagues are doing incredible work." Our impact on cancer control and our good reputation are based on the strong influence of cancer leagues all over Europe.

Together, we can make beating cancer a Mission Possible.