

Cancer leagues commend the tremendous efforts of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union devoted to strengthening the European Health Union and urge the upcoming French Presidency to keep up the good work

The [Association of European Cancer Leagues \(ECL\)](#) warmly thanks the [Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) for its strong commitment to advancing the EU healthcare debate whilst putting patients at the centre of policy-making.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to expose the **vulnerability of our healthcare systems** and weaknesses in Europe's capacity to (i) respond to **public health emergencies** and (ii) ensure coordinated, evidence-based responses from decision-makers at all levels.

Under the leadership of the Slovenian Presidency, **ad-hoc solutions were found** and pushed forward. These include (i) the successful negotiations on a [reinforced role for the European Medicines Agency \(EMA\)](#) in crisis preparedness and management for medicinal products and medical devices, (ii) the [extension of the mandate for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#) to strengthen the ECDC's work in the areas of surveillance, early warning, preparedness and response, and (iii) the [establishment of the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority \(HERA\)](#) to ensure an emergency framework regarding medical countermeasures.

The COVID-19 pandemic also keeps casting a spotlight on the **vulnerability of people living with cancer**. The EU is already helping the Member States improve resource allocation when it comes to **cancer** and the adoption of **innovative treatments**, but more can be done.

ECL warmly welcome the recent [Council Conclusions on Strengthening the European Health Union](#). Cancer leagues share the goal of making new treatments available and accessible to all patients in the EU that need them. In the last six months, thanks to the Slovenian Presidency, we were pleased to witness a revitalised interest in issues related to the **affordability and accessibility of cancer medicines** and follow fruitful high-level discussions on **repurposing existing medicinal products** to address unmet medical needs.

We congratulate the Slovenian Presidency, the European Commission and the European Parliament on the [adoption of the proposal for a Regulation on Health Technology Assessment \(HTA\)](#) on 13 December 2021, which took nearly four years of negotiations, 8 EU presidencies, 16 technical trilogues and 4 political trilogues. The new rules are all about addressing unmet medical needs, facilitating access to life-saving innovative technologies, and **building a new way of cooperating on health in the EU**.

Research, innovation, and new digital technologies are a key component in the fight against cancer, and so is **international collaboration**. We were grateful for the **participation of Mag. Robert Cugelj**, State Secretary at the Slovenian Ministry of Health, **in our policy dialogue on [cross-border collaboration in the healthcare space](#)** co-organised with the European Public Health Alliance ([EPHA](#)) and the European Fair Pricing Network ([EFPN](#)) on 9 December 2021.

European countries have shown an increased willingness to work together on **access to medicines**. Existing cross-border collaborations, such as BeNeLuxA, the Nordic collaborations and the Valletta Declaration, have shown the potential of pooling resources to facilitate access to new drugs for patients at a fair price. These initiatives can lay the foundations of robust joint HTA and horizon scanning processes and foster more transparency in the pharmaceutical market. **EU policy-makers and the upcoming French Presidency** should build on the COVID-19 vaccine procurement experience and the [EU Strategy on COVID-19 Therapeutics](#) to **centrally purchase effective, novel cancer treatments** to guarantee equitable access to new drugs with proven added value in all European countries.

We were also encouraged by the attention placed in the [Council Conclusions on Strengthening the European Health Union](#) on promoting **vaccination, early detection, and screening**, and look forward to the integration of the recommendations from the [Innovative Partnership for Action Against Cancer \(iPAAC\) Joint Action](#) into the implementation of [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#). As a proud partner of the iPAAC Joint Action, we were pleased to co-host Honourable Health Minister Janez Poklukar at the final iPAAC conference on 13-14 December 2021.

We now urge the upcoming [French Presidency](#) to (i) **keep health and cancer-related issues high on the political agenda**, (ii) **continue building a true European Health Union** that delivers for patients, (iii) apply a 'health in all policies' approach to policy-making and (iv) pursue efforts to foster the **development and equal access to affordable, high-quality medicines for all Europeans**.

ECL and cancer leagues across Europe look forward to working with all stakeholders under the upcoming French Presidency to ensure the implementation of [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#) and the [Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe](#) works well for patients, survivors, caregivers and EU citizens, and meets the needs identified by the European cancer community.