

Launch of ECL's paper on facilitating access to treatments at fairer prices through cross-border collaborations and EU joint procurement



Cancer leagues' reflections and recommendations on revitalising existing cross-border initiatives in the healthcare space and building new ones

Brussels, Belgium – In recent years, new high-priced cancer medicines with limited evidence of their added value have been launched in various European markets, the Access to Medicines Task Force of the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) warns today. This comes on the occasion of the publication of a policy paper setting out how EU policymakers, national decision-makers, and civil society can work together to reboot existing intergovernmental initiatives in the healthcare space and build new ones to mitigate this public health threat.

There is therefore a sound rationale for increased collaboration between countries in the procurement of health technologies to (i) enhance the understanding and transparency behind the price of medicines and cross-border learning through more information and experience sharing, (ii) to strengthen bargaining power and lower prices through joint negotiations, and (iii) to ensure the sustainability of healthcare systems and allow them to secure access to new health technologies.

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As Dr. Ward Rommel, Chair of the Access to Medicines Task Force, Association of European Cancer Leagues notes: *"The cancer oncology drug pipeline confronts governments and citizens with various hurdles: disparities in access, shortages, challenges prices, lack of clear data about patient benefits, and weak involvement of patients in HTA decisions. No single country can confront these challenges on its own. We believe that national governments should consider establishing cross-border collaborations or improving the existing ones to guarantee timely access to drugs with a clinical benefit and at a fair price for every European patient. To this end, in our latest paper, cancer leagues have taken a position on cross-border initiatives and EU level joint procurement initiatives in the healthcare space and suggested ways forward for policy makers and civil society"*.



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Cross-country collaborations allow for more robust HTA and horizon scanning processes that increase clarity in the pharmaceutical market that help countries set priorities and signal the price they want to pay for drugs in the pipeline. Joint negotiations can restore the balance of power between public health authorities and pharmaceutical companies. At the same time, we should take stock of the benefits and lessons learnt from the EU joint procurement agreements for COVID-19 vaccines to do better next time and extend to much-needed cancer drugs. Good agreements should be fully transparent, and the HTA process should be an integral part of the procedure and avoid curtailing independent academic research about the procured drugs.

Political commitment and an enabling policy environment are needed at the EU level to strengthen existing regional and national cross-border initiatives and foster access to medicines.

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The paper's lead author, **Dr Dimitri Kohler, Research Associate at the Swiss Cancer League**, said: *"National governments have limited resources and the evaluation of new health technologies is becoming increasingly complex and time-consuming. The paper of ECL contains concrete guidelines and makes clear that countries can start with feasible projects, such as exchanging or pooling information, and, if successful, gradually evolve towards more elaborated forms of collaboration, such as joint negotiations. The BeNeLuxA initiative is one of the examples that show how cross-border collaborations have ensured the best use of resources, time and energy of different countries to ensure swift access to new innovative drugs for patients at a fairer price. We strongly believe that governments should establish more and better cross-border collaborations to redress the information asymmetry between the pharmaceutical industry and national governments for the sake of patients and of their health budget."*



Welcoming the publication of the recommendations, **Prof Rui Medeiros, President of the Association of European Cancer Leagues** commented: *"The ECL Access to Medicines Task Force supports policies and initiatives that deliver the timeliest access to innovative affordable treatments for patients, whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of our healthcare systems. The Task Force's latest paper is a useful and timely tool to start conversations about cross-border collaboration and joint procurement initiatives in the field of medicines with policymakers and civil society"*.



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NOTES FOR EDITORS



Download the paper and recommendations:

<http://www.europeancancerleagues.org/wp-content/uploads/ECL-Cross-Border-Initiatives-Paper.pdf>



ABOUT THE ECL'S ACCESS TO MEDICINES TASK FORCE

Established in 2016, the ECL Access to Medicines Task Force aims to make safe and effective medicines available to all cancer patients in Europe by insisting on accessibility, availability, affordability and increased transparency related to medicine prices, ultimately leading to sustainability of healthcare systems. The Task Force strongly believes in the power of constructive dialogue. We urge all stakeholders to push for accessibility to high quality treatments, improving both survival and the quality of life of cancer patients. The Task Force connects 29 national and regional cancer societies in 25 European countries, representing over 500 million Europeans.



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