

World Cancer Day: United against cancer

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Opinion

Everyone has a role to play in the fight against cancer, says Alojz Peterle.



Alojz Peterle | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

This year's World Cancer Day marks the end of the 'We can. I can.' Campaign launched in 2016. This campaign encouraged us to take individual and collective action to reduce the global cancer burden. The campaign covered personal efforts including healthy lifestyle choices and the importance of taking part in cancer screening for early detection.

It also highlighted the importance of collaboration in shaping health policies such as access to cancer treatment, as well as care and support of cancer survivors in their return to work.

This year, the cancer control and cancer research community has chosen to focus on the importance of unity and collaboration in tackling cancer. Politicians, policymakers, patients, researchers, funders

and charities should all work together. In my role as Chair of the MEPs against cancer (MAC) group, I will facilitate this collaboration as much as possible to aid patients across the EU and beyond.

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Everyone has a role to play in the fight against cancer. Prevention is key, as up to 50 per cent of cancers can be prevented through lifestyle changes and early detection. Tobacco, obesity and alcohol are the leading preventable causes of cancer.

The MAC group is determined to contribute to reducing the cancer burden by promoting prevention. It has endorsed the European code against cancer (ECAC), where individuals can find out more about preventing cancer and leading healthier lifestyles.

Individuals, families and communities can also join the fight against cancer by collaborating and working with patient groups, charities and other associations as volunteers or professionals. Giving communities and patients a voice is vital, as it helps other stakeholders become aware of priorities and needs. Again, collaboration against cancer requires us to work together to fight increasing cancer incidence.

Although healthcare policies are a competence of the member states, ensuring public health is an EU responsibility. The Union's actions complement national policies, encourage cooperation between the member states and develop supporting programmes and initiatives that promote prevention, research and cross-border healthcare.

Parliament's role is primarily to ensure that public health is integrated into all EU policies. It also supports this from a budgetary perspective.

As Chair of the MAC group, I encourage my colleagues to join the group and work together to raise awareness among policymakers and pool all efforts to reduce cancer incidence. By promoting prevention; we can reduce cancer mortality by ensuring access to high quality early diagnosis, treatment and care as well as ensuring a good quality of life for cancer patients and survivors.

Almost all messages from the ECAC can be translated into policies where both the EU and member states play a crucial role. To name only a few, tobacco control policies, alcohol and junk food labelling and marketing, professional or individual use of chemicals or the use of sunbeds come to mind.

It is up to EU national governments to facilitate implementation of these policies in their jurisdictions with the support of their national agencies and the European Commission. The inevitable issue is the question of healthcare spending which ranges from five per cent of GDP in Romania to 11 per cent in Finland, France and Sweden.

Governments should realise the necessity of investing in health (prevention, research, quality of care) and the long-term benefits for Europe's ageing populations. Moreover, cancer incidence and the cost of innovative treatment are rising rapidly.

Therefore, member states should combine efforts to ensure access to both essential and innovative medicines at affordable prices for the benefit of all patients in Europe. Innovation should go hand in hand with significant improvements of survival and quality of life.

About the author

Alojz Peterle (EPP, SI) is Chair of Parliament's MEPs against cancer group

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