

European Commission's cancer plans called into question at high-level summit

Written by Jon Benton and Ana Gallego on 13 September 2019 in Event Coverage
Event Coverage

Europe's leading cancer groups have criticised the European Commission for its handling of the EU "mission" to cure cancer.



Photo credit: The Parliament Magazine

Patients remain outside of the cancer consultation process and the "moon-shot" approach is not an effective model for fighting cancer.

This was one of the conclusions reached by a panel of experts at the European Cancer Organisation (ECCO) Summit in Brussels on Thursday, where the issue of curing cancer was put under the microscope.

Curing cancer is one of five "missions" that Horizon Europe, Europe's next research funding

programme, will aim to address, starting in 2021. These missions are portfolios rather than single policy goals, with the aim of promoting research and innovation partnerships led by “Mission Boards” comprised of key stakeholders.

European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has also highlighted the need for a so-called Action Plan for Cancer.

RELATED CONTENT

- [Cancer care across borders](#) [1]
- [Atopic Eczema Day - going beneath the skin](#) [2]
- [Tackling rare diseases a 'European success story'](#) [3]
- [FemTech - Making strides for women](#) [4]
- [Inoculating against mistrust](#) [5]
- [EU urged to act on the possible health risks of mineral wool](#) [6]

A Commission representative, Dr Jan Willem van de Loo, was at the summit to present how the mission for cancer, to be led by former Nobel Prize-winner, Harald zur Hausen, would develop in the run-up to the launch of Horizon Europe.

The Commission official explained that the goal is to make the biggest societal impact, saying “the missions are not about science or research; they’re about much more than this. It’s not just about producing more data and project results.”

Nevertheless, summit attendees were almost unanimous in their disappointment with the makeup of the EU’s Horizon Europe Cancer Mission board in a resolution.

Moderator Professor Mark Lawler took aim at the EU for omitting patient representatives from the board, saying, “I’m disappointed to hear there isn’t a cancer sufferer on the cancer moonshot board.”

“If you have money for a mission and you’re going to use it wisely, you don’t make a broad declaration that Europe is going to cure cancer, because that’s a fairly silly thing to say” **Harold Varmus, Nobel Prize-winner**

The missions have taken inspiration from the US approach, such as the 1969 moon landing itself, and more recently with former US Vice-President Joe Biden launching the “Cancer Moonshot”.

Asked about von der Leyen’s Action Plan for Cancer, the Commission’s Dr van de Loo said, “we’ll have to wait and see”.

Meanwhile, moderator Professor Mark Lawler appeared less than impressed with the approach, asking, “Do we really want to shoot for the moon? It does not necessarily follow that the US model should be mirrored in a European Cancer Moonshot.”

Other panellists were also quick to pour cold water on EU’s “moon-shot” approach, with one quoting another former Nobel Prize-winner, Harold Varmus, who said “If you have money for a mission and you’re going to use it wisely, you don’t make a broad declaration that Europe is going to cure cancer,

because that's a fairly silly thing to say".

For cancer experts, inequality in cancer treatment across Europe is also a significant concern.

"We need comprehensive cancer centres in every country, and they should be connected in a network. These need access to research and innovation to cures found in other countries" **Professor Thierry Philip, President of OECl**

Asked by the moderator how to address inequality, Professor Thierry Philip, President of OECl, said "We need comprehensive cancer centres in every country, and they should be connected in a network. These need access to research and innovation to cures found in other countries."

Professor Lawler instead called for a "groundshot" for improving cancer treatment and care.

He stressed the need to put patients front and centre when it comes to reviewing and improving the way cancer is dealt with, especially when it comes to the EU's cancer mission, saying "patients should be leaders, we need to change the way we do things."

MEP and oncology professor, Véronique Trillet-Lenoir, said she appreciated the opportunity to hear about the EU's fight against cancer and agreed that patients should always be included in strategies to this end.

The Renew Europe deputy has worked in oncology for 40 years and recently joined the MEPs Against Cancer European Parliament intergroup.

"Patients should be leaders, we need to change the way we do things" **Professor Mark Lawler, Queen's University Belfast**

Providing a political perspective, the deputy said her first act as an MEP was to submit an amendment that would guarantee funding for von der Leyen's roadmap to fight cancer, adding "I will make sure there will be a budget for this."

Looking forward, Trillet-Lenoir said she will be given the floor next week in Strasbourg to underline the urgency of fighting cancer, while later this month she will also question the candidate for European Health Commissioner, Stella Kyriakides, on her plans to improve access to innovative therapies for cancer patients.

About the author

Jon Benton is content editor and Ana Gallego is editorial assistant at The Parliament Magazine

Tags

[Health](#) [7]

[Justice and Rights](#) [8]

Categories

[eHealth](#) [9]

[Health and social care](#) [10]

[Public order, justice and rights](#) [11]

[Science, technology and research](#) [12]



Site Sections

- [Home](#)
- [Content](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Magazines](#)
- [PM+](#)
- [Thought Leader](#)
- [Climate Crisis](#)
- [Editorial Calendar](#)
- [Policy Events](#)
- [Event Coverage](#)
- [MEP Awards 2020](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Services

[Dods PeopleDods](#)
[MonitoringDods](#)
[ResearchDods](#)
[EventsDods](#)
[Training](#)

Media & publishing titles

[Politics HomeThe](#)
[HouseThe](#)
[Parliament](#)
[MagazineHolyrood](#)
[Total PoliticsPublic](#)
[Affairs NewsCivil](#)
[Service](#)
[World](#)
[PublicTechnology](#)
[Training](#)
[JournalDods](#)
[Parliamentary](#)
[CompanionVacher's](#)
[Quarterly The](#)
[European Union and](#)
[Public Affairs](#)
[Directory](#)

Dods events

[Westminster](#)
[Briefing Digital](#)
[Health & Care](#)
[Scotland MEP](#)
[Awards The Skills](#)
[Summit Scottish](#)
[Public Service](#)
[Awards Public Sector](#)
[Procurement](#)
[Summit Public](#)
[Sector ICT](#)
[Summit Cyber](#)
[Security](#)
[Summit Cyber](#)
[Security](#)
[2017 Training](#)
[Journal Awards](#)

Partnership events

[The Health and](#)
[Care Innovation](#)
[Expo Civil Service](#)
[Live Civil Service](#)
[Awards Chief](#)
[Nursing Officer for](#)
[England's](#)
[Summit Women into](#)
[Leadership The](#)
[Youth Justice](#)
[Convention Socitm](#)
[Spring](#)
[Conference NHSCC](#)
[Annual Members'](#)
[Event Dods at Party](#)
[Conference](#)

Source URL: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/event-coverage/european-commission%E2%80%99s-cancer-plans-called-question-high-level-summit>

Links

[1] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/cancer-care-across-borders>

[2] https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/partner_article/efa/atopic-eczema-day-%E2%80%93-g-ing-beneath-skin

[3] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/tackling-rare-diseases-%E2%80%98european-success-story%E2%80%99>

[4] https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/partner_article/femtech-%E2%80%93-making-strides-women

[5] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/inoculating-against-mistrust>

[6] https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/partner_article/eu-urged-act-possible-health-risks-mineral-wool

[7] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/health>

[8] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/justice-and-rights>

[9] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/ehealth>

[10] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/health-and-social-care>

[11] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/public-order-justice-and-rights>

[12] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/science-technology-and-research>