

EUROPEAN ALLIANCE
FOR PERSONALIZED MEDICINE

EAPM Manifesto: Taking Cinderella to the ball - Europe's health at stake in EU elections



Neglecting the key elements in a discussion – overlooking the merits of Cinderella – will damage the health of European citizens now, and the health of upcoming generations in the years ahead. Taking advantage of new possibilities for prevention, early diagnosis, and early-stage treatment of disease will save lives and reduce suffering and ease the strains on healthcare systems. Doubling down in the fight against cancer must be a key area of action: high unmet needs, costs for patients and healthcare systems, and oncology as a driver for innovation. Ignoring the potential will condemn Europeans to unnecessary disease, leave health services staggering, and miss out on an opportunity for Europe to be globally competitive in economically valuable technologies and techniques.

In cancer care, it is time for politicians to take Cinderella to the ball.

As Europe heads into a crucial election year at a time of multiple crises at home and globally, representatives of the European public can choose to grasp an opportunity to secure a major win for citizens by recognising – and championing – the great potential of scientific and technical advances in health.

Early action against cancer – prevention, where possible, early detection, screening, and diagnosis – deploying innovations like Next Generation Screening, liquid biopsy, and smart use of health data – are revolutionising the practice of medicine. They are also prompting a shift from costly late-stage treatment to action in earlier stages, identifying the right patients at the right time, and improving clinical and personal health management.

The tools are increasingly available – and make possible a vision of quality care for all, no matter who or where, in line with the EU's core values on solidarity, making it personal, for the benefit of all. The science is there, but it is not being taken into clinical practice.



What is still missing is the policy framework to permit the use at scale of these tools, and the political will to create that framework. Current European discussions of policy frameworks for health – and there are many of them in the pipeline at present – are manifestly lacking in ambition.

- Frequent failures to coordinate at senior level among overlapping initiatives invites disorganisation and complex implementation.
- Proposals routinely suffer from a disconnect between regulatory, industrial and social policy, and fail to take account of the nature of advanced healthcare.

The better future that is within grasp is not just the result of new science, new tools and new techniques. It is also dependent on appropriately trained healthcare professionals with the expertise to use them, and on health literacy among citizens that should be mobilized at all tiers of the educational system, backed by a continuous political commitment to implement existing cancer plans.

To see where the EU is not functioning as it should, look no further than the troubled recent history of EU legislation on clinical trials or medical devices or in vitro diagnostics. Ill-considered rules failed to consider attendant issues, which led to repeated delays and emergency extensions to cope with the problems that a sort of legislative myopia created. This continues to lead to delays in providing patient access and making best use of advanced health solutions.

The incoherence continues and is embodied by the reluctance of European policymakers responsible for competitiveness to engage on EU pharmaceutical policies, by the EU's piecemeal step-based approach to implementation of recently renewed Council conclusions on screening, and by persistent confusion over an appropriate EU health data regime. Too many hurdles and unnecessary complexities have arisen. And all too often, this is because the real issue gets forgotten in discussion of technicalities or the details of individual provisions. Instead, the EU should be courageously leading a debate on how to equip public health institutions so they can ensure patient access to innovation, and can grasp the power of innovation in research and development on prevention, earlier diagnosis, and better treatment, protecting the health of EU citizens.



Look at the decline in the global position of Europe's pharmaceutical industry, with its share of clinical trials now well below what it was a decade ago, with ponderous and delayed legislation and cost-containment measures partly to blame. Look too at the global landscape of innovation - in which the main companies in diagnostics are not of EU 27 origin, a fact that is eloquent testimony of how these technologies are undervalued by European healthcare systems. Investors make their decisions based on the evolving policy and regulatory environment. European innovation should be promoted by clear pathways to reimbursement of its products: the EU cannot hope to realise its potential for patients, for health, for European entrepreneurship in a rapidly evolving world when its innovation is hampered by unnecessary complications and obstacles in its operating framework.

It can be done better. It must be done better. The EU actions on cancer, with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and the Cancer Mission, are examples of how to do things better, integrating distinct strands of policy and practice to create a coordinated approach to identified challenges. More focus must now be put on implementation and accountability. This is especially true for areas where funding and investment remains insufficient, such as in cardiovascular and neurodegenerative disease or in initiatives such as CAN.HEAL, which aim at building strong bridges between regulatory policies and clinical practices. And moving from plans to actions faster is essential, because for cancer patients, every day counts.



Taking Cinderella to the Ball requires

- Determined action by politicians to look clearly at health services and to speak candidly where they perceive opportunities for improvements.
- Pressure at policy level for health services to integrate innovation: thorough screening programs and Next Generation Screening and liquid biopsy in diagnosis, evidence-based prevention measures, and innovative treatments (particularly in earlier stages of disease), backed by the smarter use of health data.
- Support for a shift at senior policy level to ensure a common approach to multiple legislative initiatives affecting health - the pharmaceutical reform, the orphan regulation, incentivising the development of new antibiotics, the European Health Data Space...
- Stronger linking of health policy to competitiveness and strategic autonomy, by providing for take-up of innovation, thus bolstering European industry, advancing European health care, and ultimately enhancing European prosperity.
- Focusing discussion on EHDS and related legislation on the essential objective of making better use of health data to advance science and health protection.
- Recognition that cancer knows no borders, and of the potential that MEPs possess to bridge EU and national cancer plans and improve their implementation.



Political parties and their representatives must focus on mobilizing the great potential that is the EU so that it is genuinely empowered, rather than tied down by legislative and regulatory incoherence. Earlier and more fitting diagnosis and treatment are the present and future. They are often transformational for cancer and increasingly for other patients too. The EU is at a tipping point. Much has been achieved in widening EU's geopolitical and trade influence, in securing the Euro through tempestuous times, and in support for pioneering science, but now is the time that the EU matures in the health arena as it has done in other domains. As was the case for Cinderella at the ball, time is not with us - and time is not with European patients, particularly those facing inequalities in patient access to high-quality prevention and care. Patients suffering from rare diseases, neurodegenerative diseases and cardiovascular diseases will also benefit if the actions highlighted were to be applied horizontally.

Politicians can bring magic to this challenge. And they don't need a fairy godmother – they just need the political will.



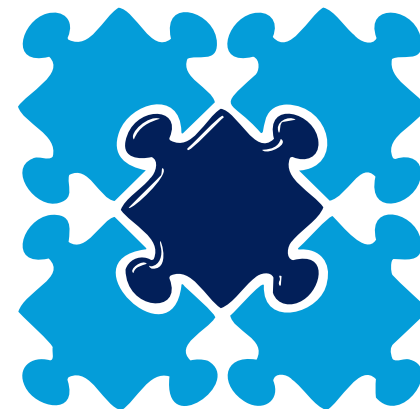
Thank you

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