

Press Release: New White Paper Identifies Challenges and Calls for Policy Actions to Enhance Cancer Care in Europe

Brussels, 29 January 2019 –The Transforming Breast Cancer Initiative today published a white paper, which provides a comprehensive evaluation of the status of breast cancer prevention, diagnosis and care across Europe and identifies concrete actions which would help to ensure equal access and better outcomes for patients across Europe.

To address these challenges, the initiative renewed its 'Call for Change', launched in April 2018, which constitute 9 policy tasks aimed at improving breast cancer prevention and care. These include the need to address the differences in cancer care across European Member States, the importance of diagnosing and treating breast cancer in the early stages, the need for support in the workplace for patients suffering from breast cancer, and the unique needs of patients with advanced/metastatic breast cancer.

Commenting on the publication of the White Paper, MEP Lieve Wierinck said *“although there has been progress in recent years, we still have a lot of work to do to ensure an understanding of the daily realities of living with breast cancer and that policymaking reflects both the individual and the societal disease burden”*. She continued, *“Adopting the 9 suggested policy initiatives in the white paper will allow us to make significant progress in addressing the challenges we face in cancer care across Europe.”*

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Europe and represents the leading cause of cancer death among women. European women's probability of developing breast cancer over a lifetime is approximately 1 in 8. In the advanced stages, breast cancer is incurable although treatable and the personal, social and working relationships of women suffering from the disease are deeply impaired.

Key findings

Specifically, the white paper finds:

- **High economic burden:** Due to its high incidence, breast cancer has the highest health care costs (€6.73 billion) of all cancer-related health care costs in Europe, but that figure could be significantly reduced by treating the disease in its earliest stages.
- **Inequalities across and within EU member states in breast cancer care:** Huge disparities in screening, diagnosis and care still persist today in the EU with worrying discrepancies among and within countries. For instance, while breast cancer incidence is higher in Northern, Southern and Western Europe due to well-developed population-based screening programs, mortality is higher in Eastern Europe due to late diagnosis, lack of coordinated cancer care and low access to therapies.
- **Psychological impact:** More attention needs to be paid to the psychological impact of breast cancer as many patients suffer from high levels of stress, anxiety, and fear related to the diagnosis and treatment; this can have an impact on the patients' capacity to socialise, stay in employment and live a normal life in general
- **Need for multi-disciplinary breast specialists' units:** Wide variations in healthcare systems can mean that many patients in the EU are not treated according to multidisciplinary guidelines. This is the case even in high-resource countries that have cancer plans.

About the ‘Transforming Breast Cancer Together’ initiative

‘Transforming Breast Cancer Together’ initiative was established in November 2017, by Lieve Wierinck (ALDE) and Elena Gentile (S&D), Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The ultimate goal of this initiative is to improve services for patients in an area of still high unmet need and reduce the societal impact of breast cancer by elevating it as a health policy priority in order to improve breast cancer prevention, diagnosis and care across Europe.

The initiative is driven by a group that currently includes MEPs Lieve Wierinck (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – ALDE), Elena Gentile (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – S&D) and Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (European People's Party – EPP), Eli Lilly & Co, European Society of Surgical Oncology, Europa Donna – The European Breast Cancer Coalition, European Cancer Patient Coalition, European School of Oncology, ABC Global Alliance, European Society of Breast Cancer Specialists, GE Healthcare, Helsinn, Novartis and Working With Cancer.

The group executes various awareness building activities under the concept of a “String of Pearls”, where each activity aimed at raising awareness of pressing issues concerning breast cancer represents a new ‘pearl’ on the string.

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