



In conversation with Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis

PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS 2014-2019: UPDATE FROM THE EU COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY.

Dr Vytenis Andriukaitis, the outgoing EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety shared his reflections on the achievements of the EU Health Programme in progressing the European health agenda for the 2014-2019 European Commission, and how he sees the future of cancer care and prevention.

Getting on top of cancer requires investment in research and innovation. Cancer is relentless. Nobody knows this better than the patients and survivors here today. But science is also relentless. And so is our collective determination to fight this disease. Europe has a massive amount of expertise, experience and data, and it is up to us to collaborate and make the most of the available tools.

When I took up my position as Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, I announced that cancer, promotion of health, protection and prevention would be one of my main priorities. Today, five years later, I am fully convinced of the need to tackle non-communicable diseases like cancer at their source.

KEY MESSAGE

Cancer is relentless. Nobody knows this better than the patients and survivors. But science is also relentless. And so is our collective determination to fight this disease.

Here is a summary of what we have achieved together in cancer prevention and treatment over the past five years.

EU Health Programme in action

The EU Health Programme has funded actions to reinforce cancer plans, address rare cancers, improve vaccination campaigns and promoted healthy lifestyles. We spend 3% of our resources on prevention. That is a drop in the ocean and we urgently need to increase this amount. But we can make sure that we spend our available funds most effectively, agreeing best practices that can be proposed to Member States with EU financial support.

The EU's Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-communicable Diseases is central to this effort. It identifies Member State priorities and highlights best practices that can be transferred, scaled up, and implemented with EU support. The Commission's Best Practice Portal is a powerful tool to share top quality practices across Europe; and the EU Health Policy Platform helps civil society and health professionals engage on public health concerns.

Promoting healthy lifestyles

The fourth edition of the European Code Against Cancer is a strong foundation for promoting healthy life choices as a cancer prevention strategy. I am delighted with current efforts of the European cancer leagues:

- » The Hungarian League Against Cancer ran a national roadshow explaining the European Code Against Cancer, reaching 23 million people.
- » In Ireland, the X-HALE programme supports youth organisations working for a tobacco-free generation.
- » Spain targets exercise and healthy diets messages on radio, television, public transport, and social media.
- » In Cyprus, teachers are participating in prevention efforts.

Tobacco control and reduction

Tobacco consumption has fallen. This is essential – it is the leading preventable cause of cancer and cancer deaths. Vital components of our effort to reduce tobacco consumption even further are the Tobacco Products Directive, the new European system for tobacco traceability, and the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. This Directive is also the first comprehensive legislation regulating e-cigarettes. I encourage all stakeholders to participate in maintaining this momentum and to remain vigilant to new tobacco products entering the market.

Screening

Screening for cancer types such as breast, cervical and colorectal cancers is saving lives every day. Over the past decade we have seen continuous improvement in national screening; 25 EU Member States have screening programmes for breast cancer, 22 for cervical cancer and 20 for colorectal cancer.

Science and innovation networks

Cooperation on cancer research and innovation is growing. We have four European Reference Networks

for rare cancers, set up under the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive, that connect medical specialists across the EU. They hold vast potential for cancer treatment and today are bringing answers to patients with aggressive lymphoma, rare malignant sarcomas and rare heart tumours.

Clinical trials

Clinical trials are key drivers of medical innovation in oncology. During my mandate, we have taken important steps towards implementing the new Clinical Trial Regulation, adopted in April 2014. This Regulation aims to make Europe more attractive for all types of clinical trials, including cancer trials, while ensuring patients' safety and the reliability of the data, and safeguarding patients' rights. This opens the door to early patient access to innovative treatments.

As I come to the end of my mandate, I assure you that cancer will remain a priority for the next Commission. Our President-Elect Ursula von der Leyen has already asked my successor, Commissioner-candidate Stella Kyriakides, to put forward a European plan to beat cancer. Given Stella Kyriakides' extensive experience as policy maker and advocate in the area of cancer, you are in excellent hands.

In conversation with Dr Vytenis Andriukaitis, EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety 2014-2019

Reflections on the achievements of the 2014-2019 European Commission mandate in helping countries combat cancer and assisting patients to receive optimal care and treatment



Commissioner Andriukaitis in conversation with ECCO's President, Philip Poortmans (left), and President-Elect, Matti Aapro (right)