

**John Dalli**

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health and Consumer Policy

## **Commissioner Dalli delivers speech on European Cancer Policy: Prevention and Cancer Information**

*Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

John DALLI, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, attends the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer (EPAAC) 2012 Open Forum

**Rome, Italy, 19 June 2012**

## EPAAC Open Forum – Rome 2012

Prevention and cancer information  
European cancer policy

Tuesday 19 June 2012  
16:00 – 17:30

Speech

Minister Balduzzi,  
Minister Gantar,  
Mr Peterle,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today at the second Open Forum of the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer.

Allow me first to thank our host, the Italian Ministry of Health, for bringing us together in Italy to celebrate the 25th anniversary of EU action against cancer.

It was here in Italy that the European Council sowed the seeds of European action on cancer in June 1985; which led to the first "Europe Against Cancer" programme launched in 1987.

We have come a long way in the past 25 years.

The European Commission has kept cancer high on its agenda for over two decades. Together with the Member States and stakeholders, the Commission supported many actions on cancer which I believe have made a difference for the millions of Europeans living with cancer.

Some of the actions we have supported over the year through the "Europe Against Cancer" Programme are:

- the Recommendation on cancer screening;
- the European guidelines on screening for some types of cancer;
- the many research projects on cancer and
- our present European Partnership for Action.

I am encouraged by progress made in Member States such as Italy, Slovenia, and many others in shaping and implementing National Cancer control plans.

I am persuaded that our Partnership against cancer is supporting Member States in establishing and implementing such plans, by fostering exchange of knowledge and developing guidelines and indicators to help them in this process.

National Cancer control plans are now in place in most European Union countries and I would very much hope that, by the time we meet again next year, all Member States will have such Cancer plans up and running.

We have come a long way, but our road is still beyond the horizon. Cancer still claims the lives of well over 1 million European Union citizens every year.

We cannot rest on our laurels. We need to do more - all together - to better prevent and control cancer across the whole of the European Union.

I am committed to supporting actions which add value to national endeavours in cancer prevention and control in a sustainable manner.

This brings me to the two themes of this year's Open Forum: prevention of cancer and cancer information.

Let me start with the prevention of cancer.

While cancer can strike the healthiest and fittest amongst us, one in three cancers are preventable.

One in three cancers are linked to what people eat, what people drink, what people do; and in particular to whether or not they smoke.

This is why we need to pass across the message that people can take steps to improve their health and avoid certain cancers; by making healthier choices as early in life as possible.

This is precisely what European action on promoting good health seeks to achieve, together with our Partnership for action against cancer and with key tools such as the European Code Against Cancer.

The European Commission is cooperating with the International Agency for Research on Cancer in updating the Code, to provide citizens with user-friendly and scientifically sound recommendations to prevent cancer.

I quote, the first recommendation of the code: "Do not smoke".

Let's start here.

Smoking is the biggest preventable risk factor for cancer. We need to act now to make tobacco less attractive, in particular to young people, and to ensure that people know what tobacco does to their health.

This is why I am looking at the regulatory means at our disposal to strengthen health warnings in cigarette packs and to regulate flavours in tobacco products. My aim is to make tobacco products less attractive for young people, to

discourage them from getting addicted to nicotine in the first place.

It is in this spirit that I plan to propose a revision of the Tobacco Products Directive later this year.

In addition, I continuously encourage Member States to adopt and enforce legislation that protects their citizens against tobacco smoke in public places; to develop awareness campaigns; and to support people who wish to stop smoking.

In this context, the European Commission launched last year the “Ex-smokers are unstoppable” campaign, which showcases the benefits of a life without smoking, through the achievements of ex-smokers. This campaign also helps people to quit smoking, through a web tool called iCoach.

Moving on, as we know, alcohol abuse is another leading cause of cancer. While the link between excessive alcohol intake and cancer has been known for decades, many Europeans are not aware of this.

With the EU Alcohol Strategy, we seek to support Member States in reducing harmful alcohol consumption. In turn, this should contribute to reducing the cancer burden.

Healthy nutrition also has a key role to play in preventing cancer and features very prominently in the recommendations of the Code. In this regard, our Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related health issues aims to help reduce health problems linked to obesity, including cancer.

I am pleased to hear about the wide range of actions to help prevent cancer and raise awareness about the disease; which civil society has put in place.

The Association of European Cancer Leagues has used some creative approaches to reach out to young people in the context of the European Week Against Cancer in May.

This year, a Youth Competition was organised, with prizes for the winners, to encourage students to learn how cancer can be prevented. Awareness raising events also took place throughout May in different European cities.

This shows that much can be done with commitment, imagination and the strong support of civil society partners.

Let me now turn to the second theme of today - cancer information.

Accurate and comparable data on cancer is vital for planning, implementing and evaluating programmes for cancer prevention, control and care.

Registries on Cancer are more advanced than for any other disease. Those Member States that have up-to-date national or regional cancer registries harbour a rich resource of valuable information.

This information is essential for comparisons about the incidence and burden of cancer at European-level and for planning, implementing and evaluating effective cancer prevention and control strategies.

Such comparisons highlight differences across Europe and enable Member States to look for ways to improve their strategies. They also provide valuable information for studying the causes of cancer.

The EU has supported many projects to enable the provision of comparable data and has encouraged high quality standards and networking of cancer registries.

A key purpose of the European Partnership for Action against Cancer is to contribute towards building a shared comprehensive cancer information system for the European Union.

Now is the time to harvest the fruits of past projects and to develop a sustainable system for the coordination of cancer registries across Europe.

We need to further develop and improve cancer data so that the European Union has access to high quality, up-to-date, cancer data on a permanent rolling basis.

The European Commission is committed to fostering a sustainable long-term cooperation in cancer data and information, a solid European Cancer Information System.

It is with this aim that we are now co-operating with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre's and with key stakeholders in this area.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I close by saying how much I appreciate and admire your dedication to the anti-cancer cause.

Whereas the achievements over the past years are impressive, I can only but express my commitment to continue to buttress our action in the years and decades to come.

I wish you all a successful and enjoyable Open Forum – and look forward to our future co-operation, and future successes, in the challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you.