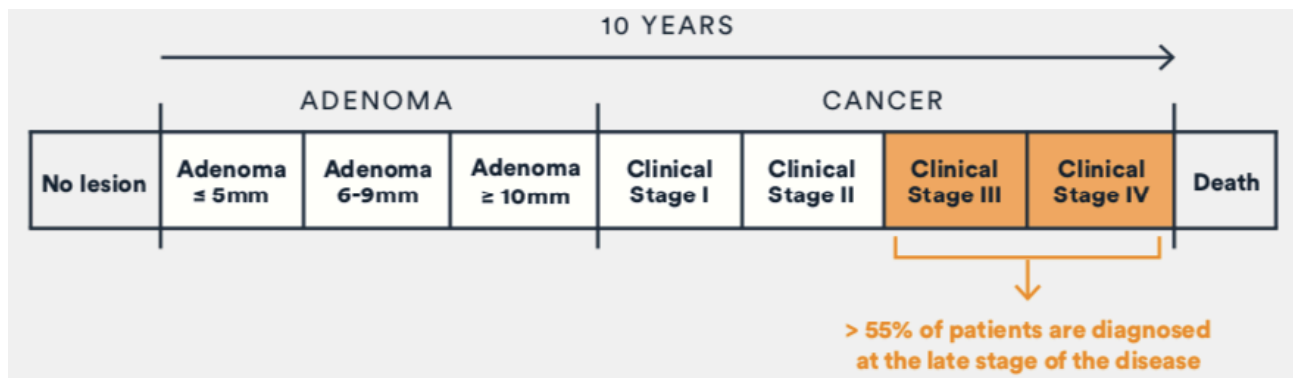


## PROPOSAL FOR A THEMATIC NETWORK COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

### **Scope of the Joint Statement**

The objective of submitting a proposal for a Joint Statement by a Thematic Network on Colorectal Cancer Screening is to encourage a more formal commitment by the EU Member States on high quality formal population-based colorectal cancer screening programmes.

In the European Union, 370,000 citizens get diagnosed with colorectal cancer every year, and 170,000 (45%) of them die. The main reason for this high mortality figure is that patients are mostly diagnosed at a late stage, when the symptoms become more apparent. Formal population-based screening programmes are one of the most effective ways to prevent colorectal cancer in addition to diet and lifestyle. Despite the long duration of tumour development, and despite the high survival rates when detected early (more than 90%), the majority of EU citizens are still diagnosed when survival chances are low, and treatments become very expensive.



In 2003, all EU Member States adopted a recommendation to have national population-based colorectal cancer screening programmes for all citizens between 50 and 74 years of age. Today, only three Member States (France, Ireland and Slovenia) have these in place for the specific target population. Some Member States have managed to set up screening programmes for colorectal cancer with more than 70% of the target population participating, therefore resulting in much earlier detection, significant increase in survival and less costly treatment. **If all EU Member States applied the current best practices in colorectal cancer screening, the number of citizens diagnosed in Stage I would increase by 130,000, offering them a potential survival rate of 90%.**

Qualitative Screening Programmes require a comprehensive and systematic structure with strong political commitment and governance, the alignment of a variety of competences and the necessary infrastructure. If organised well, screening programmes are not only cost-effective, but also cost-saving. In some of the best practice countries, eg Slovenia, the incidence of colorectal cancer has gone down thanks to screening, whilst in the rest of Europe the incidence is increasing.

### **Relevance for the European Union and European Commission**

Our proposal fits with the following policy initiatives:

- The Council Recommendation of 2003 (2003/878/EC), that all Member States “offer evidence-based cancer screening through a systematic population-based approach with quality assurance at all appropriate levels”.
- The European Code Against Cancer; the Europe Against Cancer programme, now continued in the Innovative Partnership for Action Against Cancer (iPAAC).
- The EU’s commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and specifically “Target 3” to reduce mortality for non-communicable disease by 30% by 2030.
- The “European Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Colorectal Cancer Screening and Diagnosis”

- The goals of the EU Third Health Programme to prevent disease, to contribute to innovative, efficient and sustainable health systems, and to facilitate access to high quality and safe healthcare for all citizens.
- The European Commission Initiative on Colorectal Cancer (ECICC), a person-centred initiative to improve and harmonise colorectal cancer screening and care in Europe.

### ***The current problem with colorectal cancer screening and the need for action***

Many European Member States **struggle with the implementation** of colorectal cancer screening programmes, ranging from a lack of continued investment, insufficient participation rates, lack of expertise and lack of infrastructure.

By creating a Joint Statement, we hope to bring together a number of stakeholders to commit to the aspirational goal to assist in setting up screening programmes across European Union. In order for cancer screening programmes to work well, all stakeholders should contribute, offering a wide variety of expertise and competences ranging from database management, quality medical care, laboratory and colonoscopy infrastructure, and citizen health psychology.

The topics discussed in the Joint Statement will include:

- Governance (multi-annual and cross-functional)
- Stakeholder engagement to develop a comprehensive screening programme
- Capacity analysis and investments
- Identification of barriers (geographical, psychological, social, ...)
- Infrastructure, databases and logistics
- Citizen awareness and mobilisation
- Roll-out
- Measurement and tracking

Despite the existing evidence that high quality national colorectal cancer screening programmes achieve significant results, many countries are struggling and **even questioning the need for continuing the effort**. By initiating this Joint Statement with all relevant stakeholders, we hope to encourage all Member States to continue their efforts and to help tackle some of the problems they may encounter.

The initiating partners to the project are Digestive Cancers Europe and its member organisations (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary, Spain), with new organisations potentially joining from the Nordics. Other partners can be the national and regional screening agencies, diagnostic associations, hospitals, health psychology experts, oncology societies and nursing associations.

The objective of the Joint Statement is to rally all the interested parties to improve the quality of the current screening environment, by highlighting the existence of best practices and the need for sustained efforts to screen all citizens between the age of 50 and 74.

The Joint Statement could be formally presented and further discussed at the **European Colorectal Cancer Screening Summit**, to be organised by Digestive Cancers Europe at the end of March 2020.

**The lead organisation** will be Digestive Cancers Europe, registered and based in Belgium.

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