

01/05/23



can.heal

Unleashing the power of Public Health Genomics and Diagnostics for All





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AGENDA

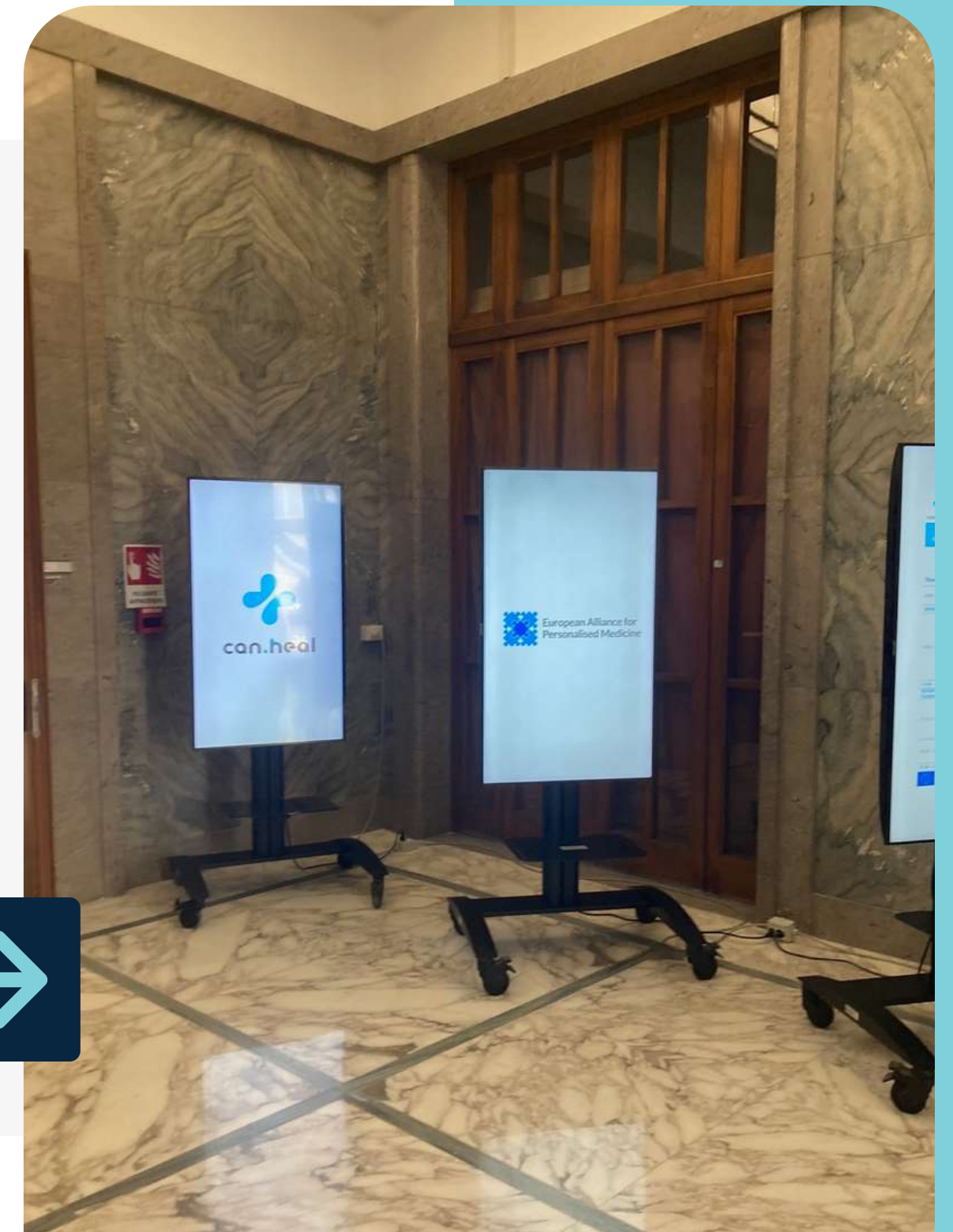
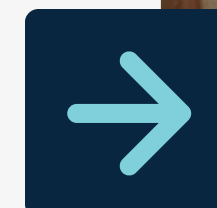
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A MOULD-BREAKING CONFERENCE – COMBINING THE STRENGTHS OF EUROPE'S CANCER-CARE POTENTIAL

CAN.HEAL was launched with the promise of a new approach, and its first conference, in April, demonstrated the meeting of that promise. Over the course of two days, partners in this Europe-wide consortium mapped out how to exploit unexplored synergies in public health and cancer genomics so as to give the right treatment to the right patient at the right time.

The participants from across Europe focused on how to generate a new degree of collaboration bridging disciplines and territories not just to advance innovation, but to bring it speedily into effective use in healthcare systems.



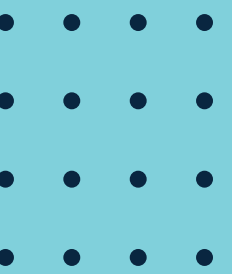


A MOULD-BREAKING CONFERENCE –COMBINING THE STRENGTHS OF EUROPE'S CANCER-CARE POTENTIAL

More than 65 speakers brought unprecedented clarity to the challenges, and identified practical and conceptual channels that can help turn the perceived opportunities into reality.

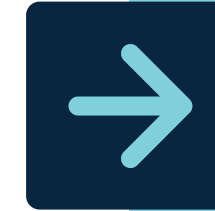
Alongside scientists and clinicians, participants at the conference, on Wednesday and Thursday April 26-27, at Italy's National Institute of Health in Rome, included public health decision makers, representatives of the Commission, Members of the European Parliament, patient organisations, and European umbrella organizations representing interest groups and associations actively engaged in the field. (cont...)

This quarterly newsletter ([sign up here](#)) provides regular information on progress and highlights the work of the partners as they drive the initiative forward. Further information appears on the project's twitter account (@CAN.HEAL) and project website (URL), and can be obtained directly from the project coordinator (xx@sciensano.be).





A MOULD-BREAKING CONFERENCE –COMBINING THE STRENGTHS OF EUROPE'S CANCER-CARE POTENTIAL



The novelty of CAN.HEAL is that it is creating unprecedented connections between the world of clinical science and the world of public health. It is specifically aiming to provide a bridge between two flagships of the European Beating Cancer Plan –'Access and Diagnostics for All' and 'Public Health Genomics' – so that cutting-edge developments in preventing, diagnosing and treating cancer become available faster and more widely.



The logo combines a cross, as a symbol of help, with an object depicting a piece of code, representing the two strands of the initiative – bringing together the power of advanced technology with care and protection.

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CONFERENCE CONTINUED

The conference has provided a major multiplier effect, combining the the presence of representatives of 17 countries with the huge reach via CAN.HEAL's 45 partners – including hospitals, universities, research organisations, public health institutes, public services, patient organisations and government ministries.

Under the title of "Reducing Disparities Across the European Union", the conference provided a unique consensus on the on-the-ground realities, and at the same time offered expert commentary on the significance for cancer care of the political, economic and social context for health policy decision-making.

As Marc Van den Bulcke, the project coordinator, told the meeting, "We are aiming to maximise expertise through coordination. There is an urgent need for cooperation and exchange, so that distinct channels of work can converge."

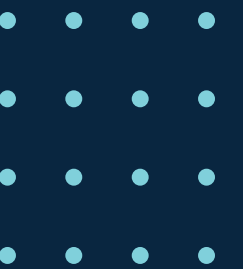




STRENGTHS – AND WEAKNESSES – OF EUROPE'S CURRENT APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING CANCER

The conference highlighted the strengths that are evident in the many EU projects to tackle cancer – and there are many projects, and many strengths. But it also drew attention to where the outcome is less than might be expected, and where the aggregate delivery of all these efforts is sub-optimal. The process, as CAN.HEAL moves into cruising speed, is to reduce perceived weaknesses and build upon the strengths to improve the overall effect felt by patients.

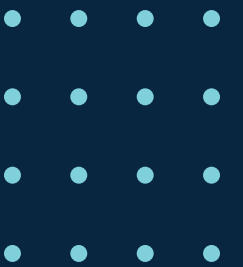
For each of the dozens of projects presented at the conference, an assessment was offered of its respective strengths and weaknesses, and where the principal opportunities – and threats – lie. What emerged from this real-time analysis was that many of the strengths lie in the high quality of information and the evidence-based approach that generate scientific advances with a proven impact, backed by strong networking and stakeholder involvement, often boosted by effective public-private alliances.





STRENGTHS – AND WEAKNESSES – OF EUROPE'S CURRENT APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING CANCER

But a frequent weakness among otherwise eminently valid projects is their fragility: they are too often economically unsustainable once initial funding has expired, risking the waste of valuable progress. The widespread dependence on national patronage also leaves many projects vulnerable to changes in national priorities, and differences of national interpretation and applications continue to constitute obstacles in relation to the medical device regulation and the EU data protection regulation. Another common challenge that threatens their effectiveness is the management of sensitive patient data that is currently widely dispersed across Europe. And insufficient access to an adequately trained healthcare workforce compounds the difficulties, as does the difficulty encountered in much intra- and inter-department coordination across the broad range of specialisations, from oncologists to nutrition experts or psychologists.





STRENGTHS – AND WEAKNESSES – OF EUROPE'S CURRENT APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING CANCER



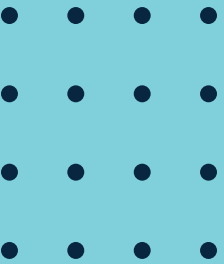
Opportunities are perceived from advances in next-generation screening and the reduction of associated costs, along with an increased awareness of the benefits of the personalised medicine this makes possible. The growth in number and type of stakeholders is also seen as offering further possibilities – including increased interest by healthcare companies.

But some unknowns and imponderables are considered to be threats facing many projects – notably barriers to data sharing, competition for funding, resources, and partnerships, uncertainties over changes in the policy and economic context at EU and national level.



SNAPSHOTS FROM THE CONFERENCE

The participants at the conference included senior academics and numerous officials from the EU institutions and member states who were keen to encourage CAN.HEAL to seize the moment. Marco Marsella, Head of the unit for eHealth, Well-being, and Ageing in the European Commission's DG Connect, said the challenge was to make multiple EU projects in this field work together optimally. "We must look not to innovation for the sake of innovation, but focus on how to use that innovation to make healthcare systems better and more efficient".





SNAPSHOTS FROM THE CONFERENCE

In the estimation of Dr. Carmen Laplaza Santos, Head of the unit for Health Innovations & Ecosystems in the European Commission's DG RTD, "Europe has great strengths that it can deploy in its cooperative culture, its healthcare ecosystem, the degree of patient engagement, and its solid scientific base. All the ingredients are there for the take-up of innovative approaches to tackling cancer."

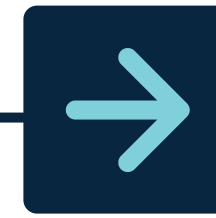
Matthias Schuppe, Project Team Leader for Cancer at the European Commission's DG Santé, said that the mission "can be achieved if all stakeholders work together".

Stefania Boccia, Professor of Hygiene and Public Health at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Rome, highlighted the – still under-valued – importance of integrating prevention into the combat against cancer. "This requires the involvement of all actors – scientists, policy makers, health professional, scientific societies and investors", she said.



Denis Horgan, EAPM Executive Director, and the co-chair of one of the CAN.HEAL working parties, underlined the need also to bring member states into the process so that they commit their support. "Each partner needs to get ready to contribute to a better future," he said.





SNAPSHOTS FROM THE CONFERENCE

Francesco de Lorenzo, president of the European Cancer Patient Coalition, the recognition of the role of patients and their involvement was central to the process. "We must see how we can become more inclusive in the way we move ahead," he said.

Ruggero De Maria, President of Alleanza Contro il Cancro, noted that the conference hosted representatives of 17 countries, and has huge reach through its 45 partners – including hospitals, universities, research organisations, public health institutes, public services, patient organisations and government ministries.

Van den Bulcke concluded the two-day meeting with the confident statement that "We are now in a place where together we can begin to create new solutions

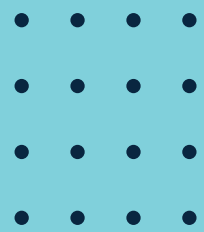




A KALEIDOSCOPE OF OPPORTUNITIES

The central concept in the conference – as in CAN.HEAL itself – is that integrating the EU's rich diversity of cancer-related activity 'will help member states to improve access for individuals and cancer patients and survivors to prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer through personalised medicine. CAN-HEAL objectives are already aligned with EBCP in developing strategies of remote genetic counselling and telegenetics, and extending the application of genetic profiling of patients, as well as facilitated treatment decisions through harmonized data interpretation. In particular the focus is on how combining the 'Cancer Diagnostic and Treatment for All' initiative with the 'Genomic for Public Health' project can upscale available innovation in cancer diagnosis and treatment. Molecular information, phenotypic and health data from patients helps to generate insights to prevent and treat cancer for the benefit of improved health and economic outcomes.

CAN.HEAL's integrated approach to improve access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment through personalised medicine also offers the possibility of links with other EU projects with similar aims such as the Joint Action on Networks of Expertise (JANE) or LEGACY's improvement of outcomes through an "omics integrative epidemiology", or IMPACT-AML's unique insights into precision medicine in the clinical trial framework.





A KALEIDOSCOPE OF OPPORTUNITIES

New IT and health-care technology is continually enhancing the potential to customise cancer therapies to unique individual patient profiles and provide more personalized cancer care. This also ties in naturally to the SYNTHEMA project of a cross-border hub for generating reliable, high-quality synthetic data that can shape new virtual patients to further enhance diagnostic capacity, assess treatment options and predict outcomes in rare haematological diseases or the HARMONY – HARMONY PLUS project on developing AI and big data in treating haematological malignancies.

The Cancer Genome Interpreter offers a perfect fit with its development of an improved AI-based tool for clinical practice that can improve cancer genome interpretation, and with Euracan's development of clinical practice guidelines in each rare cancer group. EUCANIMAGE can contribute a European big data repository and new AI tools based on new data to address unmet cancer clinical needs, which in turn evokes the utility of working in conjunction with projects such as Pioneer and Optima on real world data.





WHY IS CAN.HEAL NECESSARY?

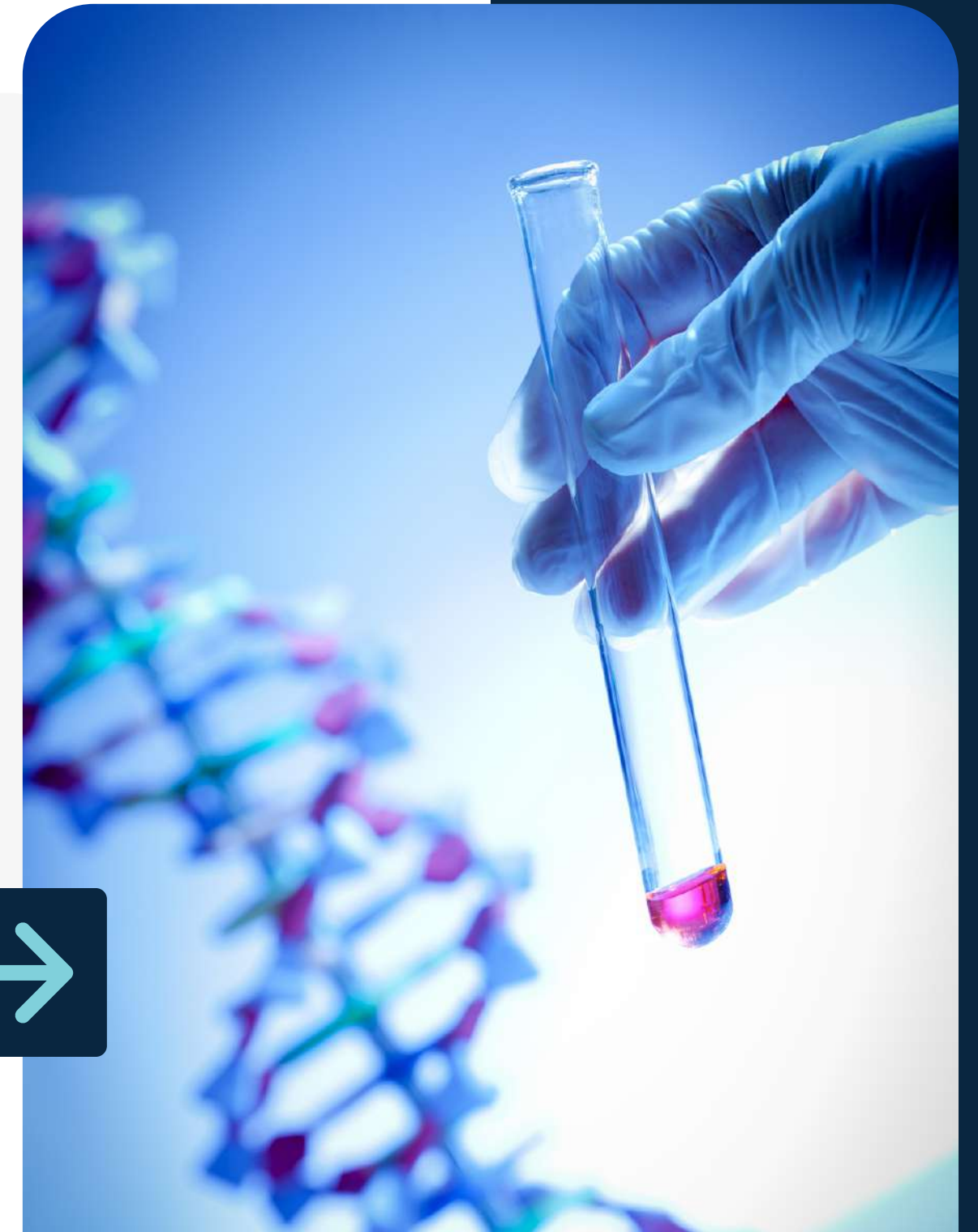
Other obvious links include the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation and Digital Europe programmes, and other valuable initiatives include Cancer Diagnostic and Treatment for All, Personalised Cancer Medicine for all EU citizens (PCM4EU), a new Partnership on Personalised Medicine, planned for Q4 2023, the European Initiative to Understand Cancer (UNCAN.eu), the 1+ Million Genomes Initiative (1+MG), the Beyond 1 Million Genomes project, and Data-driven Cancer Research (EOSC4Cancer).

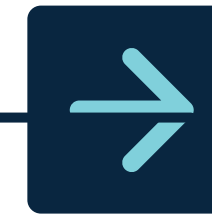




A CORNUCOPIA OF INGREDIENTS

Rapidly emerging new approaches in genomics, together with the explosion in potentially paradigm-changing Big Data streams, should allow Europe to put its millions of potential patients across different regions at the heart of a revolution in care, boosting quality and overcoming divergences in access. But for that, innovation has to be brought into healthcare systems at an effective pace. “CAN.HEAL will support the necessary coordination in a much smarter fashion to help address take-up, and this is at the heart of what CAN.HEAL is all about,” Marc Van Den Bulcke, CAN.HEAL Project Coordinator said.

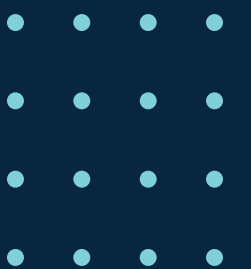




A CORNUCOPIA OF INGREDIENTS

- Genomics integrated into national healthcare systems
- More infrastructure and tools for conducting NGS and advanced diagnostics
- Molecular tumour boards and expertise to bring genomic testing to patients
- Reimbursement for NGS and liquid biopsy
- Genomic testing guidelines, recommendations, certifications and accreditation
- Education of the healthcare workforce
- Data sharing matched with security that meets technological, regulatory, and ethical considerations
- Improvement of data collection and standardization, and data interoperability
- Diagnosing and treating cancer patients at the earliest possible point – implying timely access to cancer care

- Planning to overcome inequalities in oncology treatment options
- Break down siloed approaches to provide necessary agility
- Build on the political momentum and stakeholder support for Europe's Beating Cancer Plan
- Develop correspondence between investments in prevention and health outcomes
- Maximise the cumulative merits of different evaluation frameworks to support a more structured process of decision making
- Provide more consistent access across Europe to high quality biomarker tests
- Introduce a dedicated flagship initiative on rare adult cancers
- Ensure a "success by design" strategic approach is adopted in EU initiatives





CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

The CAN.HEAL conference took place against the background of European plans for a once-in-a-generation revision of the policy context, opening up opportunities for new thinking and new approaches as the regulatory framework undergoes re-evaluation, with discussions moving ahead on new pharmaceutical legislation, sharing of health data and the battle against antimicrobial resistance.

In April, the European Commission proposed reforms to key elements in Europe's regulatory framework for medicines, relating specifically to rare diseases, paediatric medicines, research incentives, marketing authorisations, and patents. These proposals will be debated over the course of the coming months – and possibly years, in view of their scope and range – by EU legislators, in the European Parliament and among the member states meeting as the Council, and leading in due course to profound changes in the context for health in Europe.





CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

They come in the wake of proposals on sharing of health data that are already under discussion among legislators, and the continuing evolution of the European Beating Cancer plan and the EU Cancer Mission. Meanwhile, the EU is building its own general data strategy and regulation as well as legislation on AI and cybersecurity.

This backdrop of change offers new opportunities for new thinking, and CAN.HEAL is well-placed to maximise its influence to improve the use of technology and policy for the benefit of patients.





WHERE NEXT?



As Denis Horgan and Francesco de Lorenzo, co-chairs of the CAN.HEAL communications working group, summarised it, "Present and future cancer patients deserve the best, and while there are commonalities among the distinct SWOT analyses, this should not lead to adoption of the lowest common denominator." Discussing the atmosphere at the conference, he said: "There is an urgency to go forward, as reflected by the will of the stakeholders in the room, and this needs true cooperation and collaboration."

They acknowledged the efforts of the European Commission in providing the platform of the CAN.HEAL project, and this "can provide the mechanism for a bridging initiative to harness the general readiness among stakeholders and the projects presented."

The conference demonstrated that the evolution of integrated cancer care across the EU is uneven in its pace and scope – a diversity echoed too in the capabilities of distinct healthcare systems to respond to other healthcare challenges. The challenge for CAN.HEAL – and for Europe – is to capitalise on Europe's multiple strengths and diverse resources to build enhanced collaborations that will not only bridge scientific potential with public health, but also fill the gaps in cancer care delivery to individual patients.

As part of CAN.HEAL, the event was organised by the European Cancer Patient Coalition and the European Alliance for Personalised Medicine



CAN HEAL High-level Stakeholder
Conference
Reducing Disparities Across the
European Union



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THANK YOU!

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