

A regional and local perspective on the Horizon Europe mission on cancer

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ERRIN (European Regional Research and Innovation Network) and EUREGHA (European Regional and Local Health Authorities) representing over 130 regions across Europe, recognise the importance of adequate funding for cancer research as well as prevention and treatment. As such, we welcome the European Commission's initiative to address these issues in the form of a mission under Horizon Europe in the next programming period.

We particularly appreciate the missions' overall goal to create more openness, dialogue, and co-design with a wide range of stakeholders including citizens and decision makers at different governance levels. This approach will lead to a broad engagement of society in European research and innovation activities on cancer, which is needed to achieve the goal to save more than three million lives by 2030.

The mission objectives of understanding cancer, ensuring equitable access, preventing what is preventable, optimising diagnostic and treatment, and supporting quality of life are relevant, and are often linked to policy measures adopted by regional and local health authorities as health and care providers with competences in prevention and cancer testing. Regional and local authorities are vital actors as they lead, promote, and financially support research and innovation agendas. As such, they play a crucial role in prevention, health and care innovation, research, and deployment, and should therefore be central in the design and implementation of the mission on cancer.

Including the regional dimension in the mission

Even though healthcare in the European Union is predominantly a competence of the Member States, regional and local authorities share responsibilities and competencies in the sector as some countries in Europe are organised in a decentralised management system. Regional and local authorities and actors thus need to be explicitly considered in the design and implementation of the mission. To do so, regions should be mentioned next to "Member States, stakeholders, and citizens" in the mission text.

Since regional and local authorities are key in implementing research results and in deploying and sustaining innovation, their needs and contribution should be considered early on when identifying future priorities and activities deriving from the cancer mission.

As an example, regions can be key in developing effective cancer prevention strategies and optimising existing screening programmes as recommended in the mission outline. Their engagement is even more crucial in screening and treatment, when it goes to ensuring equal access to primary care services, particularly in rural areas and villages. Regional health authorities together with healthcare professionals are ideally placed to identify territorial good practices related to cancer screening. By sharing reports on the implementation of population-based cancer screening programmes, specific obstacles regarding

participation, quality, and resources can be addressed. Hence, regional experiences can help to shape screening programmes at European level.

The Mission Board should also consider the fact that substantial funding for research and innovation projects on health and cancer could come from European Structural and Investments Funds (ESIF), in particular from ERDF. Moreover, the European Social Fund, managed at regional level, may also play a big role in upskilling and reskilling work force, and contribute to the prevention and transformation of the culture around cancer. Regions can invest themselves as well in cancer research, such as research networks, clusters, support to innovative companies, etc.

In the period 2014-2020, almost all European regions had identified health as one of the priorities in their Smart Specialisation Strategies. Due to the current circumstances, health is likely to remain at the heart of European regions' concerns and strategies. In this regard, it should be highlighted that important investments have been done at the regional level in the past programming period on one of the key areas to advance cancer-treatment addressed in the mission outline: personalised medicine. A Smart Specialisation Thematic Platform partnership was established to enable joint investments in this sector. Through Horizon 2020, projects such as Saphire¹ and Regions4perMed² have also investigated at the regional level how to translate personalised medicine in complex health system settings that involves variables such as policy, regulation, industry, technologies, and patient associations. In addition, regions often deal with the crucial HTA phase that can hamper or the contrary, can accelerate the access to innovative medicine. Regions are therefore key stakeholders to involve in the mission cancer to overcome uncertainty around access to and outcomes of treatments.

It is also important to stress that coordination of research and innovation priorities and agendas is essential for the sustainability of the mission and to see tangible impact and achievements on the ground in the medium- and long-term. Regions have established health innovation ecosystems that in many cases act as living labs, which are important requirements for testing and deploying new solutions through different funding schemes and partnerships.

We also know that because lifestyles and environments differ from one region to another the cancers that develop are not the same everywhere, even at the scale of one country. Thus, the involvement of the regional level in the mission activities is crucial to ensure that regional diversity and differences are considered to avoid further inequalities when dealing with cancer. In this regard, regions are also collecting crucial data that should nurture the European Cancer Patient Digital Centre (ECPDC) thus ensuring resources for research to improve understanding of cancer and its impact on patients' and survivors' lives.

Continuous stakeholder involvement in the governance and implementation

To ensure openness, sustainability, and to build trust with citizens and society at large, it is important that the Mission Board make effective use of European networks and civil society organisations building on the knowledge and experience from health professionals and practitioners. Regions are key intermediaries to ensure the link between the mission activities and civil society. European regions are often directly involved in organising the health systems in their territories and are therefore in close contacts with health

¹ <https://www.saphire-eu.eu/>

² <https://www.regions4permed.eu/>

professionals as well as patient organisations. Regions could thus be instrumental in developing the oncology-focused living labs proposed by the Mission Board. Regional research centres and institutes specialised in cancer are often in close partnership and work hand in hand with the regional authorities. Innovation (technological, pharmaceutical, etc.) resulting from these partnerships is a key enabler for Europe to become a leader in cancer prevention and treatment.

On this basis, we propose that a close dialogue is established with networks like ERRIN and EUREGHA as well as other formal and informal networks representing regional interests in health and care. We also recommend that the Mission Board consults the Committee of the Regions as a political voice of regional and local administrations.

Guiding principles for implementing future activities in Horizon Europe

To define the future cancer research priorities, to ensure sustainability, and to make sure that activities are anchored across Europe at different governance levels, activities should:

- Apply a bottom-up approach. Activities should build on real needs emerging at the regional and local level from healthcare professionals and patients. This is crucial to successfully scale-up and deploy solutions by the health care systems across Europe and beyond.
- Emphasise implementation and sustainability. Implementation also includes the (future) skills needs of health and care professionals to be able to successfully implement research and innovation results, and as such make cancer solutions sustainable.
- Use a wide approach to assessing impact and effect. The assessment should focus on value for patients in the continuum of care, value for the overall health system, the quality of care, and at the same time address the effects on the environment and economic sustainability.

ERRIN and EUREGHA look forward to continuing the discussion on the development and implementation of the mission and are committed to being active stakeholders in the process.

Established in 2001, [ERRIN](#) promotes the regional and local dimension in European research and innovation policies and programmes. The network gathers over 120 members who primarily collaborate through 13 Working Groups, covering both thematic areas and overarching policy issues. ERRIN supports project development and knowledge exchange between members to enhance regional and local research and innovation capacities, with the aim to foster sustainable and inclusive growth in all regions.

Established in 2012, [European Regional and Local Health Authorities \(EUREGHA\)](#) is a Brussels-based network of 17 regions coming from 10 countries in Europe. EUREGHA's mission is to bring regional and local health authorities together as a means to improve health policy in Europe. By doing so, EUREGHA also establishes and promotes collaboration between its members, the institutions of the European Union and with pan European health networks and organisations working with public health and health care.