

Best practices identified from the analysis of 8 European countries' National Cancer Plans

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BACKGROUND – OBJECTIVE

- The burden of cancer is significant, with Europe ranking 2nd globally, recording 4,47m newly diagnosed cases and 1,98m deaths in 2024¹.
- In the next 20 years, cancer incidence and mortality are expected to increase in Europe by 22,5% and 32,2% respectively, highlighting the importance of establishing a robust strategy to fight cancer today².
- A National Cancer Plan (NCP) is an essential basis for a country's plan of action, offering a comprehensive framework with a structured and impactful approach, to ensure that all aspects of cancer control are addressed systematically³, in an environment that fosters collaboration, research & innovation, data-driven decision making and equity across population groups.
- Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP), released in 2021 from the EU Commission, aspired to serve as such a framework in the fight of European countries against cancer towards a healthier and more resilient EU. EBCP addresses 4 key pillars; cancer prevention, early detection, diagnosis & treatment and improving patients' & survivors' quality of life⁴.
- For countries that aspire to design a NCP, best practices, successfully implemented in other countries, could serve as a basis for national dialogue and add value to the planning process.
- Aim of this study is to present best practices identified through the analysis of 8 EU member states' National Cancer Plans, that could be leveraged across countries.

METHODOLOGY

- Through the Cancer Inequalities Registry, the OECD Country Cancer Profiles, the ICCP (International Cancer Control Partnership) portal and each country's Ministry of Health, 20 National Cancer Plans were identified among European Region countries.



Note: At the time of the analysis, countries that had renewed only a part/a few actions of their National Cancer Plan, were not included as "Countries with active National Cancer Plans".

Figure 1. The 20 countries with active NCPs in Europe, 2023⁵

- The analysis focused on 8 countries' national cancer plans, based on their suitability as a benchmark for Greece, their experience on cancer strategy implementation and their vision in the fight against cancer.



- Several cancer-related best practices were identified. The best practices were categorized in 8 pillars, based on:

their alignment with EBCP's goals, using its 4 key pillars as a guide:

- Prevention
- Early detection
- Diagnosis & Treatment
- Patients/Survivors' QoL

the frequency in which the remaining best practices appeared across countries, creating 4 additional pillars:

- Patients' engagement
- Monitoring
- Research
- Pediatric cancers

RESULTS

- More than 30 best practices were identified across the 8 countries.
- Approximately 70% referred to national actions aligned with EBCP pillars, focused primarily on "Diagnosis & Treatment" (10) and "Early detection" (7).

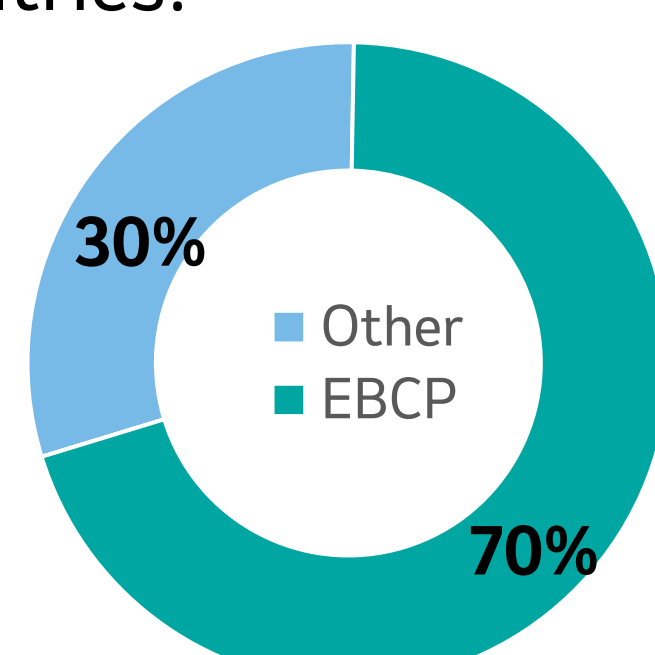


Figure 2. Break-down of best practices among EBCP (70%) and other pillars identified (30%)

- Several best practices identified, were related to the 4 EBCP pillars:

Prevention

- Prevention Plans & Taxation policies (tobacco, alcohol, obesity)
- Offer/ Funding of cessation apps, counselling services, etc.
- Health literacy/ Awareness campaigns on key risk factors

e.g., The "nutri-score" label impacted positively 60% of France's food buying habits

e.g., Italy launched a multi-stakeholder awareness campaign, addressing key risk factors (e.g., smoking, alcohol, physical activity), titled "Guadagnare salute"

Early detection

- Enhance screening access (mobile teams, age group expansion)
- Set up of National Screening Committee/ Board/ Network
- Ensure monitoring & reporting of high- quality screening data

e.g., France offers mobile mammograms & colorectal self-tests to enhance access

e.g., Slovenia has one ad-board of experts per screening program & a National Screening Committee; Cervical & Colorectal cancer incidence is lower

Diagnosis & Treatment

- Establish policies for fast Diagnostic & Treatment pathways
- Concentrate services in specific centres & establish CCCs
- Strengthen participation in European Reference Networks

e.g., In Czech Rep. MDT assessment is required to reimburse some treatments

e.g., Romania's separate list for onco patients' appointments reduced waiting time

e.g., Concentrating surgeries in key hospitals in Spain improved performance and OS

Patients' & Survivors' QoL

- Provide patient & carer services (psychological counselling, leave, allowances, listening points at hospitals)
- Recognise/ Extend survivors' "Right to be forgotten"

e.g., Both patients & carers receive psychological support, leave & allowance in Romania

- The remaining ~30% derived from the additional 4 categories, focused primarily on "Patients' engagement" (5), and "Monitoring" of a Plan's implementation (3).

Patients' engagement

- Participation in National Cancer Strategy planning
- Participation/ Feedback in drugs' assessment/ reimbursement
- Help develop Patient-Reported Outcome (PRO) measurements

e.g., In Belgium & Italy, patient groups take part in NCPs' planning

e.g., In Spain, Patient Association Groups (PAGs) can receive government funding

Monitoring

- Cancer care monitoring includes various stakeholders (e.g., PAGs)
- Specific bodies monitor a NCP's implementation
- A network of stakeholders supports quality indicators' monitoring

e.g., In Poland & Spain, PAGs participate in cancer care monitoring

e.g., In Slovenia, Expert Council & a Supervisory Board monitor NCP implementation

Research

- Support research/ excellence networks
- Support patients' inclusion in international trials

e.g., France & Spain work on strengthening research networks

Pediatric cancers

- Support pediatric cancers' management with EU collaboration
- Pediatric cancers' home-hospice network

e.g., Poland has established a separate organisation structure for pediatric cancers

e.g., Italy has 47 treating institutions & accredited Pediatric Cancer Network facilities

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- The analysis showed significant alignment among countries and EU's cancer priorities, underlining the impact of frameworks like EBCP at national level.
- The categorization of the best practices provides a comprehensive overview of the key pillars and specific actions that countries prioritize regarding cancer care, thus identifying similarities & common health policies.
- "Mapping" of specific targets & best practices, successfully implemented across a mix of EU countries, adds value to the national dialogue and planning process.
- 70% of national best practices were related to EBCP pillars. Most focused on "Diagnosis & Treatment" (e.g., establishing policies for faster diagnostic & treatment pathways), and "Early detection" (e.g., ensuring reporting and monitoring of high-quality screening data).
- This analysis, incorporating the EU experience, could be leveraged from countries like Greece, aiming to design a robust National Cancer Plan.

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