

PRESS RELEASE

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Colorectal cancer screening campaigns can save more than 130,000 lives annually in the European Union

The Basque Region, the Netherlands and Slovenia show the way

Brussels, 28 February 2019 – Today, Digestive Cancers Europe launched a campaign to promote colorectal cancer screening at the occasion of the start of European Colon Cancer Awareness Month (ECCAM). The event took place at the European Parliament and was hosted by MEP Lieve Wierinck (ALDE).

Building on the successful 2018 theme #Time4Change, this year ECCAM will be focusing on making people aware of the benefits of detecting colorectal cancer early by taking the screening test which Digestive Cancers Europe believes may save an additional 130,000 lives every year.

The most avoidable number of deaths in the EU

Every year, 370,000 citizens in the European Union get a diagnosis of colorectal cancer and 170,000 of them die. Patients who are detected early (Stage I), have a chance of survival of 90% as compared to only 10% when detected in stage IV. Despite the fact that colorectal cancer evolves slowly, over a period of eight to ten years, the majority of patients are still detected in the late stage III & IV.

This makes the case for early screening an easy one, especially because the treatment of early stage cancer is cheaper than late stage, and over 3 billion euro of savings could be generated in the healthcare system every year.

The campaign consists of three activities:

- **#My Best 10 Seconds** - The launch of a **Public Awareness Campaign** on the importance of getting screened. This social media campaign focuses on the little effort it takes to get screened and the huge life-saving impact it may have. A video shows other small daily things that take up ten seconds of anybody's time. In colorectal cancer screening, this little effort may save one's life.
- A **White Paper on Colorectal Cancer Screening** in Europe – the paper comes with **ten policy recommendations** to improve the current situation in the European Union. Only
- A **Roadmap for Colorectal Cancer Screening**. The publication offers a step-by-step approach on how to organise colorectal cancer screening campaigns at national level, based on the good results of Slovenia, the Netherlands and the Basque region in Spain.

The Public Awareness Campaign will be launched through social media in Finland, France, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain. The video campaign is addressed at citizens of 50 and older. Ads will appear in news feeds on Facebook and as 'pre-roll' on You Tube, aiming to reach over 1 million citizens. National Associations will further amplify the efforts locally. Jola Gore-Booth, Executive Director comments: "*We want to make people aware that they can have control over their own life. Many people are still hesitant to test themselves, yet it's clear that everybody older than 50 should get screened. The effort is minor, and there are no downsides to it. The*

testing is easy, as is colonoscopy. There is really no reason to risk one's life by not participating in screening programmes. Still too many people wait. That's why our campaign is so important."

The White Paper highlights the fact that despite the commitment from all EU Ministers of Health in 2003, only three Member States (France, Ireland and Slovenia) have organised Formal Population-based Colorectal cancer screening programmes addressed to all citizens between 50 and 74 years old. The best outcomes were achieved in the Netherlands (citizens older than 55), Slovenia and the Basque country:

- Increase in early detection from 15% to 48% of the population
- Decrease in colorectal cancer mortality
- Overall cost saving in the healthcare system

If all Member States achieved the same results, the number of citizens detected with early stage cancer could be improved from 55,000 to 185,000, and therefore significantly increasing chances of survival. Every year. Stefan Gijssels, Executive Director comments: *"There is no rational reason not to organise formal national screening campaigns. It saves lives and money. The major barrier we see is a political one. It takes a lot of effort and time to organise, and screening campaigns require a sustained effort. The financial savings in the healthcare budget may only be visible ten years after the start, but the upside in the number of lives saved should justify screening. As we have seen, the quality of the screening programme is critical to its success. Luckily, several Member States are starting now to have a more professional approach to screening. We can assist them if needed."*

Digestive Cancers Europe represents 40 National Associations in 30 European countries and is active in the areas of oesophageal, gastric, pancreatic, colon, rectum and rare cancers of the digestive tract. The Organization collaborates with Pancreatic Cancer Europe.

European Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month was established in 2008 as an Annual Awareness Raising initiative by EuropaColon, which has now expanded to become Digestive Cancers Europe (DiCE). The Organisation will give a voice to people living with all types of digestive cancer (including colorectal cancer, gastric cancer, oesophageal cancer, pancreatic cancer and rare gastrointestinal cancers).

All the materials of the campaign are available on www.mybest10seconds.com

For more information, please contact

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