

To EU Permanent Representations

04 November 2022

**Joint call from the digestive health community
for protecting the EU Council Recommendations on Cancer Screening
and upholding the scientific advice**

Dear representatives (health attachés),

As European organisations **uniting**, on one hand, **over 50.000 digestive healthcare professionals and representing**, on the other hand, **over 858 000,000 citizens who get diagnosed with a digestive cancer every year**, we would like to raise our serious concerns regarding the developments that we understand are taking place in respect to approving the new EU Council Recommendations on Cancer Screening.

We are particularly concerned about the weakening of the recommendation to expand screening to gastric cancer. Around 136,000 Europeans are diagnosed with gastric cancer and 97,000 die from this cancer every year. **If effective prevention is not implemented, the number of deaths related to gastric cancer in Europe will even increase up to 124,000 until 2040.** Approximately 90% of all gastric cancers are related to H. pylori infection. Based on the latest scientific evidence, approximately 40% reduction in mortality is achieved by eradicating H. pylori among healthy individuals.

Therefore, we ask that the recommendations on screening for H. pylori in those countries or regions with high gastric cancer incidence and death rates, is protected from further weakening. In line with the European Commission's proposal, which is supported by scientific evidence, **the new EU Cancer Screening Recommendations should not undermine and contradict available evidence and miss a real opportunity to make a change in the lives of many Europeans.**

We are equally concerned about the emphasis on the financial and national situation when it comes to implementation of the recommendations at a Member State level. While we understand the limitations of the healthcare systems, from the experience with the colorectal cancer screening, we know that prevention through screening if performed as organised formal population screening with participation rates of above 65% is the cost-effective tool that saves many lives across Europe.

The 2003 Council Recommendation have proved successful at encouraging Member States to implement population-based screening programmes. Whilst clear progress has been made in the implementation of screening programmes across the EU, there are still vast disparities between Member States in the quality and coverage of their national programmes.

In the recent years, we've seen a greater willingness to acknowledge the Union's role in health care. This has also been reflected in the EU Cancer Screening Scheme, a flagship initiative of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. **It is now the time for Member States to show true commitment to fighting cancer decisively and collectively. Don't miss the chance to set a new course for cancer screening in the EU.**

Sincerely,

Helena Cortez-Pinto
UEG President

Patrizia Burra
UEG Public Affairs Committee Chair

Lieve Wierinck
Digestive Cancers Europe