

Workshop Report

Delivering the EU's Beating Cancer Plan – Prevention is Better than Cure

18 November 2020

Introduction

On 18 November, The British Chamber of Commerce EU & Belgium brought together a high-level group of industry experts and scientists as well as representatives from the European Commission and MEPs to discuss how effective action on cancer prevention offers the best path for a successful Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

The event outlined concrete steps the EU and European stakeholders can take to tackle preventable cancers. The workshop involved a broad range of presentations from industry and scientific experts on their fields of expertise, followed by a panel discussion on the presentations and questions from the floor. Throughout the discussion, a key theme was the role that public and private sector cooperation can play in targeting the 40% of cancer cases that are preventable. Harm reduction policies that help tackle addiction and protect workers from carcinogens in the workplace emerged as a potentially enormously useful part of the Cancer Plan's pillar on prevention.

Dan Dalton, CEO of the British Chamber of Commerce Belgium, said: *"I am delighted that we managed to bring together such an impressive group of stakeholders, policymakers and experts from across the EU. Clearly, there is room for an unprecedented amount of cooperation between public and private stakeholders in the fight against cancer in Europe. Innovation focused on harm reduction and prevention is paramount and will benefit the world for generations to come. This workshop has left no doubt in my mind that if we work together and think beyond boundaries, we can take significant steps against preventable cancers to ease the burden of the disease across the continent."*

The following is a summary of the event, from the introductory remarks to the interventions and the Q&A session.

Event Structure

- Introductory Remarks
- Session 1
 - The EU and Fighting Cancer: Factors for Success
 - The Food Industry and the Fight Against Obesity
 - Combating Addiction to Beat Cancer
 - The importance of prevention - best practices and tools
- Session 2
 - The View of the European Chemicals Agency
 - Protecting Workers

Introductory remarks

- **MEP Tomislav Sokol** opened the workshop, welcoming attendees and talking about the importance of beating cancer, especially in the context of Covid-19. MEP Sokol highlighted that 40% of cancers are preventable, and that cancer is the second leading cause of death in Europe. He said regulatory tools have potential to help change and adjust peoples' daily lifestyles.
- **Dan Dalton, CEO of the British Chamber of Commerce, EU and Belgium** then gave introductory remarks, laying out the format of the event.

Session 1

The EU and Fighting Cancer: Factors for Success

- **Stefano da Empoli, President of I-Com**, spoke about the importance of prevention in the Beating Cancer Plan, saying prevention is one of, if not the most important pillars of the Cancer Plan, and that harm reduction can play a key role in preventing cancer. Da Empoli cited I-Com's recent study on the Cancer Plan, which found significant potential for policies that help citizens make healthier choices, such as introducing advertising restrictions on junk food and making less risky alternatives to cigarettes, like vaping, more available.

The Food Industry and the Fight Against Obesity

- **Dr. Stephan Peters, Vice Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board Dairy and Health of the EDA** discussed obesity as a risk factor for cancer, saying it is "a very complex problem." He pointed to the Netherlands as one of the "best countries in fighting obesity," with a relatively low percentage of its population being classed as overweight. Peters stressed the importance of a multifactorial approach in tackling obesity, saying the food industry wants to cooperate in the development of the Cancer Plan.

Combating Addiction to Beat Cancer

- **Professor Thomas Hartung of Johns Hopkins University** spoke about the potential of harm reduction to help reduce cancer, specifically citing the potential of vaping to reduce smoking induced cancers. Hartung said vapes have just "3-5% of the risk" associated with traditional cigarettes, showing they have a role to play in helping the EU to overcome smoking induced cancer. He called for stricter controls on flavours and additives used in e-cigarettes.

The importance of prevention - best practices and tools

- **Pietro Fiocchi, Italian ECR MEP and shadow rapporteur of the EP Special Committee on Cancer**, said improved cancer screening programs have a very important role to play in preventing cancer. Fiocchi said that smoking, particularly among young people, is a major risk factor for cancer. He said it is important to avoid methods like raising taxes on substances like tobacco or telling smokers they will die from smoking, because higher taxes will just mean that smokers buy them from somewhere else and smokers will continue to smoke, regardless of the information you share with them. Further, he highlighted the very widespread problem of radon in private homes and called for communication, testing and funds for corrective action to be made available.

Q&A on Session 1

- Opening up the floor for discussion, **Dan Dalton** asked the panel how much harm reduction can help in reducing cancer, particularly the role that vaping could play.
- **Thomas Hartung** said in the ideal scenario, 40% of cancer cases could be prevented by harm reduction. Even if this is not realistic, however, he said a “sizable” amount of cancers could still be prevented with harm reduction. He said smoking levels could be reduced by engineering healthier methods of delivering nicotine, like e-cigarettes, and then ensuring that smokers receive information about them.
- **Stefano Da Empoli** said it would be best if smokers were able to all “quit outright,” but it is “important to be realistic.” He said e-cigarettes have a role to play in harm reduction, citing statistics from France that showed 700,000 smokers have quit through the use of e-cigarettes.
- **Jindřich Vobořil** of the Institute for Rational Drug Policies (IRAP) said that realistically some young people will smoke and asked whether, from a harm reduction perspective, it is best to look for an increase in vaping versus a decrease in smoking.
- **Thomas Hartung** commented on the existence of an addictive personality and that something needs to be offered to such people as an alternative. He preferred to steer consumers from smoking to vaping as a public health measure which reduces the risk.
- **Pietro Fiocchi** confirmed that the European Parliament Special Committee on Beating Cancer, BECA, will include a paragraph on vaping in their report to the European Commission on the Cancer Plan. He said BECA will rely on scientific evidence to ensure the paragraph on vaping contains the correct information.
- **Dr. Stephan Peters** said any policy addressing addiction needs to take account of consequences including scientific information and changing the consumer environment and behaviour. With obesity, you hear it’s genes but it’s genes that load the gun and the environment that pulls the trigger.
- **Thomas Hartung** compared the amount and regulation of food additives and flavours in the USA and in Europe where controls are far stricter. He supported strongly the stricter European regulation and control of additives in e-cigarettes. He said his concerns do not pertain so much to the large producers who introduce a level of safety he appreciates and we have to get under control the situation where anyone can buy anything from the internet.
- **Yiannis Korkovelos** of **Philip Morris International** asked whether the EU Commission will incorporate harm reduction into the Cancer Plan, or if the opportunity to do so has already passed.
- **Stefano da Empoli** said that failure to include harm reduction in the EU Cancer Plan would be a missed opportunity.

- **Pietro Fiocchi** said that the process for developing the Parliament report is complex but said harm reduction should be put in the report and believes that the majority of BECA MEPs would support its inclusion.
- **Stefan Peters** highlighted the importance of transparency in consumer messaging and taking account of local cultures. He took the example of Nutriscore which he felt would not be successful as a general EU approach because it was inherently opaque as an algorithm and did not reflect local or national dietary differences. He felt that a 'best in class' approach like that developed in Nordic countries.
- **Laurent Huber** of Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) said the debate is controversial in the public health community but there is a legitimate role for harm reduction with smokers who are unable to quit. The concern is the diametrically opposed motives of transnational tobacco and governments. A genuine harm reduction strategy would also reduce the level of addiction within the general population. How can we maximise the potential of harm reduction but avoid a situation where in 20 years 80% of the general population is using reduced harm products?
- **Catherine Berens**, of the EU Commission's **DG Research and Innovation**, said that Horizon Europe's Mission on Cancer will provide the evidence necessary to inform policy making. She said better dialogue between scientists, policymakers and citizens is important.
- **Thomas Hartung** said that public health must often be advanced without "perfect data," saying that "policy cannot wait for perfect data." He stated that while he did not like who is making money from vaping, he did like that it is having a positive impact on public health.
- **Dan Dalton** asked if harm reduction policies could form a part of the European Parliament's report and the Commission's Cancer Plan.
- **Pietro Fiocchi** said it is a complex, long procedure but BECA's report will allow opportunities "to move on specific topics and specific policies," but it is too early to tell, in detail, how this will turn out.

Session 2

The View of the European Chemicals Agency

ECHA Director Christel Musset gave a presentation on the view of the ECHA on how to beat cancer. She outlined how ECHA's work can contribute to exclude carcinogens in consumer products and ensure risk management in workplaces. She said there are 120,000 work-related cancer diagnoses in the EU, which policymakers must take into account in developing the Cancer Plan.

Protecting Workers

- **Dr. Adam McCarthy of the Cobalt Institute** spoke about the need for workers to be protected from over-exposure to carcinogenic chemicals in the workplace. The topic of protecting workers from over-exposure has been consistently mentioned in the context of the cancer Plan. He said a binding occupational exposure limit, or boEL, is a “win-win”, as it is better for both worker protection and for the industry to implement.

Q&A on part two of the workshop

- **Dan Dalton** asked the speakers how the Beating Cancer Plan could best work with existing regulation on chemicals to achieve EU objectives regulation on chemicals
- **Christel Musset** highlighted the need to make the most efficient use of the existing legislative framework, especially through dialogue with the member states for selecting the most appropriate and effective regulatory measure. She suggested that the Beating Cancer Plan consider how to make sure we have a coherent and consistent framework, avoid overlaps and simplify where possible. She also referred to the importance of border enforcement on chemicals in products imported to the EU.
- **Dr. Adam McCarthy** said that there could be more emphasis on Risk Management Option Analyses to enable selection of the most effective approaches. He also mentioned that sometimes, substitution is not possible and effective risk management was needed.

Closing remarks

- **MEP Tomislav Sokol** closed the event, thanking all participants. He said EU legislation could do a lot more in the area of prevention and be “streamlined” to tackle some of the issues mentioned. He pointed out that the next meeting of BECA will take place on 2 December, and said that the meeting will focus on risk factors and healthy lifestyles and their importance for cancer prevention. He promised to do his best to raise prevention and lifestyle factors with the other MEPs in BECA.