

# **Report on the Youth Policy Dialogue with Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare**

Title of Youth Policy Dialogue: Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

Date: 4 February 2025

Location: Albert Borschette Conference Centre, Rue Froissart, Brussels

## Introduction

On World Cancer Day, a Youth Policy Dialogue brought together Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare and 30 young people (aged 20-30) from across the EU, who were youth cancer survivors or early-career healthcare professionals, working in the field of oncology.

The overall aim of this Youth Policy Dialogue was to create a better understanding of the lived experience of young cancer survivors and professionals and to give them the possibility to share their views on EU health policies and programmes related to cancer. Given the specialised nature of the topic, participants were identified and nominated by the European Network of Youth Cancer Survivors, (EU-CAYAS-NET project coordinated by Childhood Cancer International – Europe and involving Youth Cancer Europe) and the Young Cancer Professionals (YCP) group of the European Cancer Organisation (ECO). In doing so, organisations took care to ensure appropriate gender and geographical balance.

The event took place in Brussels and was moderated by Dr. Sarah-Taïssir Bencharif, an emergency physician and free-lance health journalist.

The dialogue consisted of an opening statement from the Commissioner, followed by a tour de table where participants briefly introduced themselves. 10-minute statements from each group of the young participants set the scene for each of the 2 separate discussions which enabled participants to share their lived experiences and views on EU health policies. The Commissioner responded in depth to the many points raised

## Summary of the online preparatory meeting(s)

DG SANTE held regular meetings with the EU Network of Youth Cancer Survivors and the European Cancer Organisation to identify and agree on overall themes for discussion on the practical and logistical elements of the event.

On 27 January, DG SANTE joined an online meeting of the young people with lived experience of cancer, organised by EU-CAYAS-NET to prepare the event, walking the participants through the agenda of the Youth Policy Dialogue and discussing other elements of their visit to Brussels. SANTE had regular exchanges with ECO's coordinator of the Young Cancer Professionals group including on the potential issues or themes which could be addressed.

Two participants (cancer survivors) were filmed for a testimonial video produced by the European Commission on the occasion of World Cancer Day.

## Summary of the Youth Policy Dialogue (In person-meeting)

In his introduction, Commissioner Várhelyi highlighted young advocates' key role in shaping EU cancer care policy. He noted the Commission's commitment to create the European Health Union while advancing cancer prevention and care through initiatives like Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP) and the EU Mission on Cancer. The Commissioner reaffirmed that the implementation of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan remains

a political priority for the European Commission, and it will serve as a model to address other non-communicable diseases.

Participants shared their insights and experiences. They spoke freely about their cancer experience from diagnosis to treatment, and their lives before, during, and after cancer. Cancer healthcare professionals gave insights into their practical and research work. All participants acknowledged progress in the EU, underlining the importance of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and the EU Mission on Cancer, backed by substantial European funding. However, they highlighted remaining gaps and challenges, calling on the Commission to address the specific needs of adolescent and young adult cancer patients and invest more in high quality data, prevention, digital health, as well as reducing disparities within EU Member States and regions.

In his closing remarks, the Commissioner thanked the participants for this Dialogue, which allows to better understand the needs of adolescent and young adult cancer patients and young cancer professionals and reaffirmed that the EBCP will continue further implementation, considering the Dialogue's themes and young patients' perspectives.

## Topics of discussion

### **First discussion: How can EU health policy and programmes better serve patients and survivors?**

Participants stressed the unique challenges young cancer patients face, highlighting in particular fertility counselling, psychosocial support, and post-treatment care. They called for better follow-up and survivor support. The Commissioner affirmed that EBCP initiatives will continue, with a focus on young patients, and pledged support for Member States in enhancing aftercare. Participants also highlighted the inconsistent approach to (discussing) fertility preservation in cancer care across Europe, despite research supporting its importance.

Participants acknowledged progress in prevention, screening, and care but noted access gaps in rural and remote EU areas. The Commissioner pledged to further tackle inequalities, aiming to ensure equal access for all.

Participants recommended that the Commission involves young cancer survivors in policymaking to ensure care meets their needs, recognizing them as key stakeholders.

The issue of dismissal due to cancer was addressed, with the Commissioner reaffirming that laying off sick employees is illegal in the EU.

Technology, data (sharing), and Artificial Intelligence in cancer care were recurring topics. Participants called for an overarching EU data strategy and better access to quality data, whilst also raising ethical concerns. They also called for improved technology training for health professionals. The Commissioner confirmed the data strategy as central to the EU's healthcare vision, ensuring secure sharing, strong protections, and ethical safeguards.

Participants urged the Commission to lead with stricter smoking rules and smoke-free generation initiatives to reduce tobacco-related cancers, as well as with public health campaigns to address alcohol-related cancers

In case there were more than one topic/theme, this section can be divided into thematic subsections. This should include the following:

**Second discussion: How can EU health policy and programmes better respond to challenges faced by young cancer professionals and the provision of care?**

Participants noted that despite significant EU investment in cancer research and extensive data availability, few findings reach clinical practice. They urged the Commission to accelerate the translation of research into practice, highlighting slow clinical trials and patient travel burdens.

Participants noted disparities in genetic testing for young cancer patients in some Member States and called for free testing for those with a family history of cancer.

Concerns were raised about potential future cuts to the EU health budget and their impact on cancer projects. The Commissioner reassured the participants that the Commission would continue the implementation of the EBCP with appropriate funding.

World Cancer Day provided a useful hook and focal points for the youth policy dialogue. All participants appreciated the chance to engage with the Commissioner around this topic at an early stage in his mandate. They felt heard and appreciated his considered responses

## Follow-up Activities

- At the Dialogue, Commissioner Várhelyi expressed his intent to examine the EU policy on the preservation of fertility, recognizing it as a key focus in cancer care for young patients. Additionally, he emphasized the Commission's willingness to support any further stakeholder joint efforts to advance the right to be forgotten. He stated that the implementation of the EBCP will continue with a particular focus on addressing the needs of young cancer patients and survivors. Finally, he expressed his desire to meet with participants again in a year to review progress in the cancer field. •
- This event report, videos and other elements will be published online and have also been shared and promoted by participants from the respective organisations via their personal and other channels. •
- The Youth Policy Dialogue was promoted via SANTE's social media channels (X and LI) as well as through the Commissioner's X account before and during the event - generating over 8000 impressions in total). An after-event post was also published on LinkedIn - generating over 2000 impressions.



## Annex

[YPD agenda](#)

[Event Page on European Youth Portal](#)

[Event page on European Commission Public Health website](#)

[Recording of the event](#)

[Testimonial clip: Surviving Cancer: 2 Powerful stories of hope / EU Beating Cancer Plan](#)

[EC Audiovisual Service Coverage of the YPD](#)