



## Event Report:

Stakeholder Meeting on Improving Access to Cancer Screening & Prevention among People Experiencing Homelessness in Europe: The CANCERless Project

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**Date:** March 19, 2024

**Time:** 16:00-18:00 CET

**Location:** Room 6Q1, European Parliament, Brussels

**Hosted by:** Mr. Stelios Kypouropoulos, Member of the European Parliament, European People's Party, New Democracy (Greece)

**Organiser:** FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless)

**Speakers:** Mr. Stelios Kypouropoulos - MEP, European People's Party, New Democracy (Greece), Mr. Freek Spinnewijn - Director FEANTSA, Ms. Ruth Owen - Deputy Director FEANTSA, Prof. Igor Grabovac - Project coordinator, Medical University Vienna, Mr. Richard Price - Head of Policy, European Cancer Organisation, Mr. Francisco Rodriguez - Project Officer, Joint Research Centre, EU Commission, Mr. Alejandro Alejandro Gil-Salmerón - Senior Researcher, International Foundation for Integrated Care (IFIC) UK, Ms. Maria Moudatsou - Vice-president, PRAKSIS Greece, Dr. Martina Knapp- Health Navigator CANCERless Project & Medical Doctor, Medical University Vienna.

**Chair:** Irfan M Lone - Advisor for Policy & Communications Cancerless.EU - (FEANTSA)

## Introduction

On March 19, 2024, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (**FEANTSA**) convened a stakeholder meeting in the framework of the **CANCERless.EU** project at the European Parliament in Brussels. The gathering aimed to address the critical issue of cancer screening and prevention among individuals experiencing homelessness across Europe. The meeting was hosted by **Mr. Stelios Kypouropolis (MEP, Greece)**, bringing together experts, policymakers, and representatives from the social, health, and cancer communities to discuss strategies for improving access to essential healthcare services.

The meeting paved a unique opportunity to highlight the core of "**Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**", focusing in particular on its Equity pillar, an issue of great importance to the **CANCERless.EU** project and Europe's vision of a "**Cancer Free Europe**". Emphasising the rights-based approach to social and health care justice for people experiencing homelessness, this stakeholder gathering also spotlighted first-hand, evidence-based information on a range of unique barriers in health/cancer care and highlighted the need to address them.

### Key Objectives

The meeting focused on the following key objectives:

- **Spotlighting the **CANCERless Project**:** Participants delved into the project's core mission, research findings, and its impact over the past three years. The **CANCERless Project** aims to enhance cancer prevention and early detection, specifically amongst people experiencing homelessness in Europe.
- **Policy Recommendations:** The stakeholders engaged in robust discussions to formulate actionable policy recommendations. These recommendations are intended for the European Commission and other relevant stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to integrate these recommendations into broader healthcare policies and social justice initiatives across Europe.
- **Sustainability & Synergies:** The meeting focused on ensuring sustainability for the knowledge base generated throughout the project, particularly by

encouraging the adaption of the Health Navigator Model in various disease and stakeholder domains. Additionally, the CANCERless consortium used this opportunity to call to action and welcome the cancer and health care community to employ and amplify the results of the CANCERless project in their advocacy, particularly with regards to marginalised groups.

## Event Overview

### Section 1: Opening remarks

#### European Public Health Landscape, Priorities and Possibilities regarding Homelessness and Cancer

Irfan M Lone began discussions by providing important background information on the issue at hand. He highlighted a number of startling facts, including the connection between cancer and homelessness, and the fact that these issues are often neglected in the realm of public health amid coexisting and competing priorities. One of the driving causes of this phenomenon is the conflicting social and public health demands that governments, communities, and health institutions must deal with in in resource-constrained environments. Challenges like these can often become overwhelming, especially when layers of poverty, violence, loneliness, illness, migration, and climate change are added.

#### Link Between Homelessness and Health

Irfan went on to highlight the fact that homelessness disproportionately affects people in vulnerable situations, especially when it comes to health and access to healthcare services. Individuals experiencing homelessness already face reduced life expectancy due to their harsh living conditions, lack of access to basic necessities, and limited healthcare resources. Addressing their health needs, including cancer prevention, is crucial not only for health and socio-economic gains, but also to ensure socio-economic justice and overall wellbeing for societies.

## Housing Stability as a Sensible Health Intervention

Irfan went on to highlight the fact that cancer, as a major health concern, affects everyone regardless of their housing status. He noted that people experiencing homelessness encounter unique challenges in accessing cancer screening and preventive services for reasons that run parallel to their social status and existence. He stressed that ensuring their well-being requires targeted efforts and innovative approaches at all stages and across all levels.



*Greek MEP Mr Stelios Kympouropoulos delivers his welcoming speech at the Cancerless Project Event*

## Welcoming remarks by Mr Freek Spinnewijn

Irfan then introduced FEANTSA director **Mr. Freek Spinnewijn**, who thanked host **MEP Kypouropolis**, and welcomed alongside him the speakers and attendees. He initiated the event with a range of impactful remarks on homelessness and health in Europe. Stressing the importance of acknowledging housing as a key indicator for improving health screening access among those experiencing homelessness, he also urged stakeholders to collaborate for enhanced health and social equity. After the formal introduction from Mr. Spinnewijn, the host and keynote speaker for the event **MEP**

**Kypouropolis** welcomed the participants. He emphasised the need for a better integration of health and social systems across member systems in order to provide optimal solutions for marginalized populations, particularly people experiencing homelessness. His powerful speech underscored the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address health disparities and ensure inclusivity in European public health.

## Section 2: Introducing CANCERless

### Introducing the Project (Video)

The CANCERless Project video opened the session to provide the delegates with an overview of the project. This video presented a brief summary of the project, whilst emphasizing the urgent need to enhance access to cancer screening and prevention for homeless individuals.

### Project Vision, Mission & Lifecycle

Project coordinator **Prof. Igor Grabovac** from the Medical University of Vienna, then went on to provide a detailed overview of the project. He illustrated how, through the application of research and the Consolidated Framework, the CANCERless project aimed to lower the cancer burden and health disparities among people experiencing homelessness in Europe. Throughout its three-year long lifespan, the project envisioned to co-create and offer person-centred and evidence-based healthcare services that make it easier for people to have prompt access to high-quality cancer screening, prevention and treatments. He highlighted how CANCERless is a promising approach to lowering cancer mortality rates amongst people experiencing homelessness by removing the barriers to cancer prevention and screening services. He argued that it supports and complements Europe's fight against cancer and the European ambition of not leaving anyone behind. He finished by stating that the project aimed to achieve equity in cancer prevention through the implementation of timely preventive strategies and through the optimisation of healthcare pathways.

### Health Navigator Model: Eliminating Barriers and Increasing Health Literacy

The partners from International Foundation for Integrated Care (IFIC) UK represented

by **Mr. Alejandro Gil-Salmerón** introduced the Health Navigator Model, which is a key component of the CANCERless Project. Alejandro highlighted that this is an essential and empowering model in providing individuals with relevant health and health service-related information. Through the active engagement of trained Health professionals, people experiencing homelessness are guided through the complex healthcare system, ensuring timely screenings, education, and follow-up care. By eliminating barriers, this model empowers these individuals to take charge of their health and proactively participate in preventive screenings for cancer.

### Patient Empowerment and Participatory Design

Mr Gil-Salmerón highlighted the fact that the CANCERless Project emphasizes patient empowerment and recognizes that healthcare interventions must consider the living context of homeless individuals. He outlined how a participatory design approach reduces the top-down nature of public health interventions, fostering collaboration and understanding whilst keeping people experiencing homelessness at the core.

### Opportunities and Challenges in Implementation

**Ms. Maria Moudatsou**, as the representative from the Greek partners Praxis, presented their perspective and experiences on the implementation phase of the project. Delegates were informed about the realities of reaching out to people on the ground, including the care providers, institutions and actors involved in offering health care services. Perspectives on a number of key challenges and solutions, based on their own experiences and national health care systems were also shared with the delegates. Homelessness often precedes or exacerbates various health conditions. Data from studies in Vienna, UK, Greece and beyond highlight the need for strategic designs that explicitly include people experiencing homelessness in healthcare initiatives.



*FEANTSA Director Mr Freek Spinnewijn delivers remarks at the Cancerless Project Event*

### Section 3: Panel Discussion - Policies & Priorities for Equitable Cancer Care in the EU and Synergies with the CANCERless European Project

#### **Cancer Inequality Registry**

As a major component of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the European Cancer Inequalities Registry (ECIR) tracks differences across EU Member States. This was introduced by **Mr. Francisco Rodriguez**, the representative of Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC), a fundamental body for developing evidence for health policies for Europe. The ECIR employs an indicator framework to assess countries' progress in cancer prevention and care. The registry helps with targeted actions by revealing patterns and inequities through the provision of trustworthy data. In order to guarantee equitable cancer prevention and care across Member States and regions, ECIR plays a crucial role in supporting policymakers by drawing attention to areas that require improvement and by encouraging collaboration. The registry aims to include data from vulnerable groups such as, people experiencing homelessness and the Roma community, creating a roadmap for addressing cancer

disparities. It advocates for housing as a fundamental pillar in tackling health inequalities.

### EU regulations and policies on equitable access to cancer care for all.

This section, presented by **Mr. Richard Price**, Head of Policy from European Cancer Organisation (ECO) focused on synergies of the CANCERless project with various other EU projects and how such initiatives are shaping cancer policies across Europe. ECO contributed by sharing their scientific, strategic and advocacy inputs, whilst highlighting their engagement and involvement in various European projects in cancer care. This section also highlighted the health equity pillar of 'Europe's Beating Cancer Plan' and explained how CANCERless is a promising approach to improving access to cancer prevention and screening across the EU. Furthermore, the fact that the European cancer community could use the knowledge pool and data from CANCERless in their advocacy work was also stressed. Mr Price finished by highlighting the issues of collaboration and joint action, emphasising the need for one strong voice across stakeholder communities to amplify momentum when it comes to those who are underrepresented across cancer/health care and the wider social domain.

### Reaching out to “Hard to Reach” Groups: Experiences from a Health Navigator’s lens

In this section, presented by **Dr. Martina Knapp** - the health navigator from the Medical University of Vienna, we were informed about the experiences and challenges faced when reaching out to people, maintaining contact with patients, finding affordable solutions, and navigating health insurance complexities. Dr Knapp also highlighted how people experiencing homelessness remain excluded from many measures and solutions, including health policy. She concluded with a powerful note by emphasising the need to strengthen connections between the social and health sectors.



*Dr Martina Knapp shares her experiences and thoughts at the Cancerless Project Event*

## Key Takeaways

This section was presented by FEANTSA's deputy director, **Ms. Ruth Owen**, who provided a summary of the key takeaway messages for participants to reflect upon. These key points serve not only as a strong call for action, but as an opportunity to work for equity in health, cancer, social justice and ending homelessness across Europe.

- **Holistic Approach:** Addressing cancer prevention amongst people experiencing homelessness requires the consideration of social determinants of health, housing stability, and mental well-being.
- **Education and Awareness:** Tailored educational campaigns empower people experiencing homelessness to seek preventive care.
- **Policy Integration:** Policymakers must integrate CANCERless Project recommendations into broader health policies.
- **Community Engagement:** Community-based initiatives enhance trust and

facilitate access to cancer services.

### **Bridging the Gap**

Whilst health and homelessness may seem unrelated, they intersect significantly. It is vital that we recognise this connection and operationalise target groups in as clear a way as possible in order to achieve comprehensive healthcare and social justice.

### **Challenges and Solutions - Linking the Dots to Prevent the Preventable among people Who Bear the Biggest Burden**

Europe's commitment to cancer prevention through the EU Cancer Plan sets a precedent. Implementation however, remains a challenge within and across member states and health systems. Initiatives like Horizon Europe open up the possibility, not only for the European Cancer Community, but also for stakeholders beyond the EU to share best practices in this area. The Health Navigator Model, for example serves as a symbol of progress, demonstrating that tailored interventions can bridge gaps and improve health outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

The CANCERless Project's stakeholder meeting brought together important stakeholders in the area of public health and policy, and used the opportunity to underscore the urgent need to improve cancer prevention and screening for people living in vulnerable situations. In addition, the meeting called for collaborative stakeholder action and a commitment to working towards broader and fairer pay offs in the public health domain, ensuring that no one is left behind in the "fight against cancer in Europe". By facilitating the sharing of good practices and knowledge, and through the adaption and implementation of innovative models and approaches, the CANCERless project provided a contribution both in practice and policy for achieving equitable and sustainable health outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Europe.

### For more information

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