

Proposal Thematic Network EU Health Policy Platform 2021
Public health Area: Integrative Oncology in Patient-Centred Cancer Care

Integrated Nutrition Cancer Care [iNC²]

An indispensable part of multidisciplinary patient-centred cancer care

The protection of the nutritional state of a patient with cancer is critical for their treatment outcomes and quality of life, and it is a patient's right to have access to high-quality nutrition cancer care.

Given the high prevalence of nutrition-related problems and the effectiveness of early interventions, **Integrated Nutrition Cancer Care** should be implemented throughout the whole care continuum from prevention to cure and care up to end of life. It can only be successfully achieved through multidisciplinary, cross-sectional collaboration. Nutrition is an integral part of cancer care where patients can take the lead in their disease pathway, making patient education a vital part of patient-centred cancer care.

Scope and relevance

With over 2.7 million new cancer cases diagnosed in 2020 in the EU, the role of nutrition in disease prevention and optimising outcomes has never been more important. It is estimated that up to 30% of cancer cases could be prevented through a healthier diet and lifestyle. Importantly, up to **one in two patients with cancer experience involuntary weight and muscle loss** that undermine the effectiveness of treatments, increase risks of side effects, increase length of hospital stay, reduce quality of life and increase cost. Ensuring access to care is key to reducing health inequalities between EU citizens. By enhancing the response to expensive drugs, nutrition could increase cost-effectiveness of cancer treatment and, with that, may contribute to reducing possible inequalities.

Overwhelming scientific evidence supports that weight, body composition, and nutrition intake play an essential role in all stages of cancer treatment and the risk of developing certain cancers. Despite being the single most frequent, serious complication in cancer, malnutrition continues to receive unacceptably low priority in some **national cancer care policies**. While overweight and (pre-) obesity is proven to be linked with various diseases such as diabetes, fatty liver, pancreatitis and cancer, patients that are obese are just as much at risk of malnutrition and muscle loss (sarcopenia) which may be even more likely to be overlooked, despite their clinical significance. For those in whom cure is no longer possible, delay in providing nutritional support impairs quality of life and reduces survival time.

High-quality cancer prevention and care cannot be delivered without addressing the existing gaps in healthcare: workforce training, clinical pathways and dietetic services are often not available, leaving many patients without **timely access** to information, dietary counselling or nutrition support needed to achieve their best possible outcome.

Links to the EU Policy Agenda

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan carries a strong commitment to giving all patients in the EU the same access to high-quality care. The plan supports, coordinates and complements the member state's efforts to reduce the burden of cancer and aims to cover the entire disease pathway. Nutrition is part of every step of this cancer care pathway, and Integrated Nutritional Cancer Care requires a well thought out implementation. Additionally, **Europe's Beating cancer plan** prioritises prevention and at least 3 of the 12 points listed in the European Cancer Codex address nutrition.

The **EU4Health programme** aims to address gaps in national health care systems. Successful implementation of Integrated Nutritional Cancer Care is largely dependent on the quality of national health care systems, including patient centricity. **If you are serious about health, you should be serious about nutrition.**

Horizon Europe's Mission on Cancer aims to optimise cancer treatment, support quality of life of patients, and ensure equitable access. Integrated Nutrition Cancer Care and its digital enabling services should therefore be part of **Horizon Europe's** Health impact area 'Good Health and high-quality accessible healthcare'.

Aim and objectives

The Integrated Nutritional Cancer Care thematic network will inform and engage a wide range of stakeholders, including Doctors, Patients, Dietitians, Geriatricians, Physiotherapists, Psychologists/Psycho-oncologists, Nurses, Pharmacists, Politicians, EU officials, National Ministries of Health and health authorities. The Thematic Network will be a meeting point for everyone involved and interested in Integrated Nutrition Cancer Care to share good practices. The joint statement will inform the European Commission and other stakeholders how to effectively and systematically integrate nutrition in all aspects of patient-centred cancer care. This includes:

- ⇒ Leveraging the joint statement through the EU wide '[Optimal Nutritional Care for All](#)' campaign;
- ⇒ To develop a truly integrative approach, the composition of the network partners ensure cross-border, regional, multidisciplinary and multistakeholder input;
- ⇒ Stakeholders will include patients, healthcare professionals and health authorities;
- ⇒ The Joint Statement and Thematic Network will drive sharing of Good Practices and will build on existing science, guidelines and [recommendations](#)

Confirmed Thematic Network partners and supporters

- **The European Cancer Patient Coalition** ([ECPC](#)), 450 members, covering all EU member states
- **The European Patients' Forum** ([EPE](#)), 150 million patients through 77 patient organisations in 19 countries
- **The European Federation of Associations of Dietitians** ([EFAD](#)), 35.000 dietitians through 33 members in 28 European countries
- **The European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism** ([ESPEN](#)), 65 Member societies in 64 countries.
- **The European Geriatric Medicine Society** ([EuGMS](#)), representing 40 countries
- **The European Association for the Study of Obesity** ([EASO](#)), 15.000 leaders in obesity research
- **The European Oncology Nursing Society** ([EONS](#)), 28.000 cancer nurses
- **The European Nutrition for Health Alliance** ([ENHA](#)), a multidisciplinary nutritional care network in 19 countries
- **The European Network of Dietetic Students** ([ENDiets](#)), 6.000 European nutrition & dietetic students

Possible Thematic Network partners: PGEU, EMSA, HOPE, AIM, EGAN, EAN, ECCO.

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