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World No Tobacco Day 2024: European Societies call for an EU Endgame on Tobacco



30 May, Brussels - Ahead of World No Tobacco Day 2024, European scientific, healthcare professional and other civil society organisations call for an EU Endgame on Tobacco.

Noting the official pledge by the European Commission in 2021 to help deliver a tobacco free generation, the European Respiratory Society, the European Cancer Organisation, the European Society for Medical Oncology, the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention, Smoke Free Partnership, the European Lung Foundation, the European Society of Cardiology, Lungs Europe and Lung Cancer Europe jointly call for an acceleration of policy action to make the achievement of that vision a reality.

Public health organisations have recently expressed disappointment at delays and stalled activity on previous pledges to, for example: update EU Council Recommendations on smokefree and aerosol free environments; review and update the Tobacco Products Directive, the Tobacco Taxation Directive, the Tobacco Advertising Directive and the legal framework on cross-border purchases of tobacco by private individuals; and enforcement of EU laws and full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, including the obligations on transparency.

To correct this loss of momentum, the organisations are calling for the next European Commission 2024-29, that will follow next month's European Parliament elections, to:

1. Ensure that the update of the Council Recommendations on smoke-free and aerosol-free Environments are included in the political agenda of the next Presidency of the Council of the European Union to protect citizens from secondhand smoke in outdoor locations such as playgrounds, restaurants, beaches etc;

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2. Bring the taxation of new tobacco products and nicotine in line with that of cigarettes and increase the minimum tax rates on cigarettes and fine cut tobacco;
3. Ban flavours in both tobacco and vaping products and prohibiting flavour accessories and additives;
4. Introduce an annual public monitoring mechanism for tobacco control policies to measure Member States' fulfilment of EU legislation and recommendations to ensure the achievement of a Tobacco Free Generation by 2040; and,
5. Implement the COP10 commitments, and ensure better alignment in tobacco policy across Europe with the objectives and political efforts promoted by the WHO.

In line with the theme of World No Tobacco Day 2024, the organisations also specifically call for the protection of children from tobacco industry interference. The tobacco industry targets young people as the base of their business as this population group represents the source of replacement tobacco users. The involvement of the industry with emerging products hasn't changed this. A recent review of 189 studies on vaping and e-cigarettes concluded that non-smoking youths who use e-cigarettes have substantially higher likelihood of starting smoking.[1] While the tobacco industry is adapting its tactics through continuous innovation and marketing, legislation to prevent the uptake of smoking and protect people from the industry is lagging behind.

Professor Filippos Filippidis, Chair of the Tobacco Control Committee of the European Respiratory Society said: *“Tobacco control legislation is instrumental in limiting the reach of the tobacco industry and in preventing the uptake of smoking among young people. The European Commission needs to act very soon; otherwise, progress towards a tobacco-free generation will stall resulting in millions of avoidable deaths.”*

Dr. Csaba L. Dégi, President of the European Cancer Organisation, said: *“One in five cancers in Europe can be attributed to tobacco use. This cannot continue. An industry producing such human misery must be taken out of business. On World No Tobacco Day we urge all politicians running for election to the European Parliament to commit themselves to championing an EU Endgame on Tobacco.”*

Professor Jean-Yves Blay, ESMO's Director of Public Policy, stated: *“With evidence emerging that new products like e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products pose serious health risks, the Commission's lack of action in this area is frankly incomprehensible, particularly given the Beating Cancer Plan's commitment to 'addressing key risk factors such as tobacco and with the aim to ensure that less than 5% of the population uses tobacco by 2040.' As we approach the European elections and the appointment of the next College of Commissioners, we call on Europe's citizenry to vote for candidates who will genuinely prioritize the delivery of the Beating Cancer Plan and not be distracted from this crucial task by the siren calls of the tobacco lobby.”*

Professor Donna Fitzsimons, Co-Chair of ESC Advocacy Committee said: *“Cardiovascular disease is the world's biggest killer and as much as 10% of all CVD deaths are attributable to smoking. Yet up to 200 million euro of taxpayer money is being made available for tobacco farming from 2023- 2027. Today we are prioritizing the means to destroy public*

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health rather than preserve it. The next term must be one where we turn a corner and protect EU citizens from industries that seek to profit from harming them.”

[1] Banks E, Yazidjoglou A, Joshy G. Electronic cigarettes and health outcomes: epidemiological and public health challenges. *Int J Epidemiol.* 2023;52(4):984-992.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Europe’s tobacco addiction

- Tobacco consumption is the largest avoidable behavioural risk factor to health and the most significant cause of premature death across EU countries. With regard to cancer, tobacco contributes to 20% of all [cancers in Europe \[1\]](#) and half of all preventable cancers, which translates into approximately 750,000 preventable cancer cases in Europe each year.
- Currently, tobacco is the leading cause of more than [ten types of cancer \[2\]](#) and 82% of all lung cancers are due to smoking. Risks and associated diseases are not limited to smoking, with secondhand smoke is also associated with cancers of the oral cavity, esophagus and pancreas [3].
- According to the [WHO World Tobacco Prevalence Report \[4\]](#), the European Region ranks second globally with approximately 25.3% of the population using tobacco, with estimates clearly showing that by 2030 the WHO European Region is expected to have the highest rates globally, with a prevalence of just over 23%.

Beating Cancer Plan pledges still to be fulfilled

Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan was published in February 2021 on the occasion of World Cancer Day. It pledged to:

- *“help create a ‘Tobacco-Free Generation’ where less than 5% of the population uses tobacco by 2040, compared to around 25% today.”*
- *“Reach an interim goal of the WHO target of a 30% relative reduction in tobacco use by 2025 as compared to 2010, corresponding to a smoking prevalence of around 20% in the EU.”*
- review the Tobacco Products Directive, the Tobacco Taxation Directive and the legal framework on cross-border purchases of tobacco by private individuals
- *“update the Council Recommendation on Smoke- Free Environments both extending its coverage to emerging products, such as e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, and expanding smokefree environments, including outdoor spaces”*
- Achieve *“better implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.”*
- Extend the EU track and trace system to all tobacco products by 2024

The organisations connected to today’s statement express their concern that progress on these pledges remains unfulfilled.

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In order to meet the much-needed goal of a tobacco free generation in Europe, a revitalisation of tobacco control policy is called for under the next European Commission 2024-29.

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