

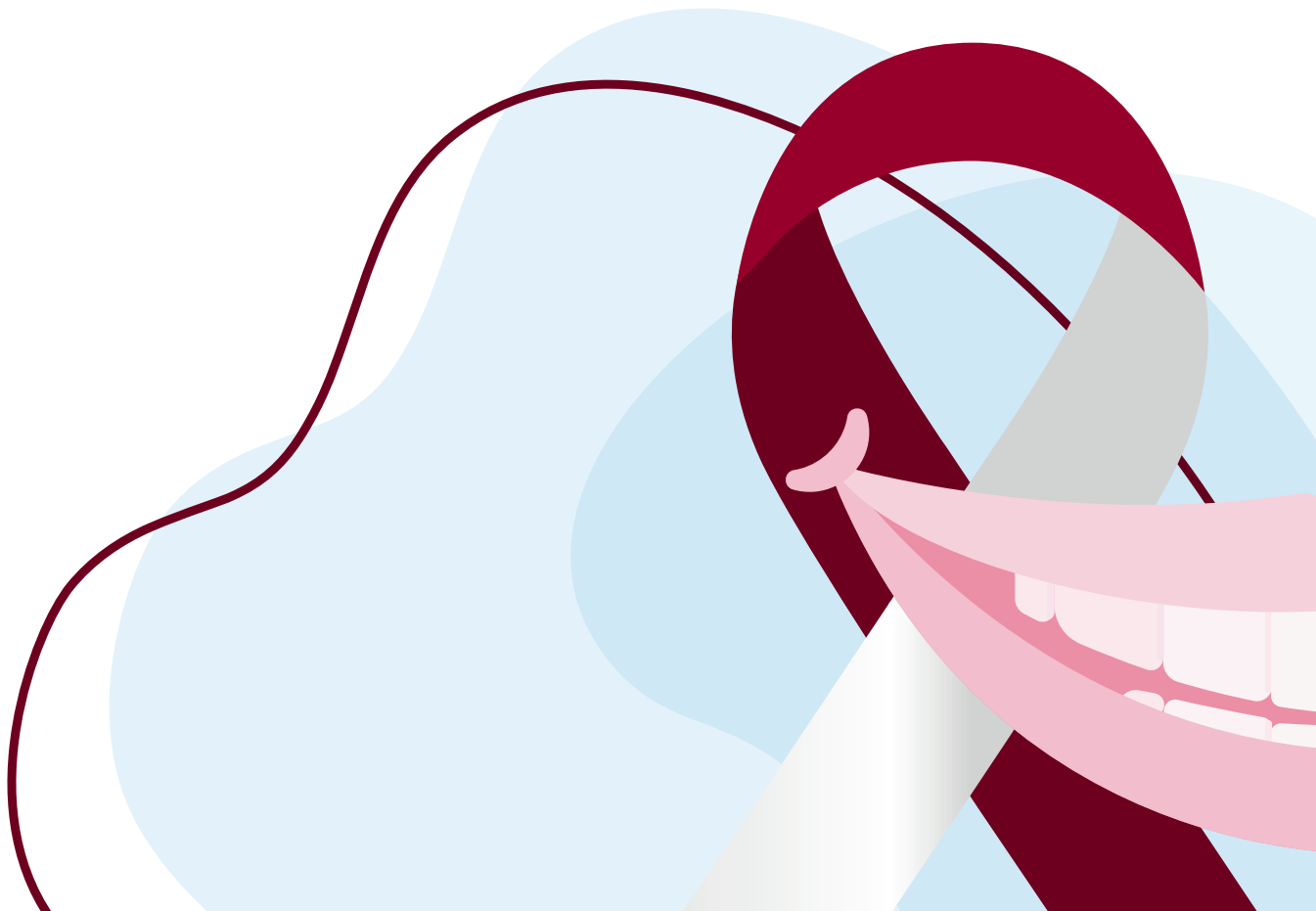
Oral Health & the Beating Cancer Plan

platform for better
oral health
in europe

→ Executive summary

Good oral health is integral to wellbeing. The Platform for Better Oral Health in Europe is fully committed to working with European policy-makers in the context of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to develop integrated health promotion and preventive strategies to address the main determinants of the disease and reduce the incidence of oral cancer in Europe.

In particular, [we call on the European Commission to propose an Action Plan on oral health in Europe](#). This Action Plan should address rising inequalities in access to oral health services and leverage the potential role of oral health professionals in the prevention and early detection of cancers and other NCDs. This can be achieved by working in tandem with public health initiatives such as the Beating Cancer Plan and building on the resolution on oral health which the WHO's Executive Board recommended for adoption at the upcoming 2021 World Health Assembly meeting.



→ Oral health and the Beating Cancer Plan

Oral and oro-pharyngeal cancers are the 8th most common cancer in Europe, with a consistent increase in numbers of cases over the last two decades. More than 100 000 people a year are diagnosed with oral cancers in Europe and it is the 11th leading cause of mortality from cancer. Although oral cancer can be detected on visual inspection, the vast majority of patients present to hospital with advanced stages of the disease, which is burdened by high mortality. The average mortality of oral cancer has not improved over the last 30 years with less than 50% of patients being alive 5 year from diagnosis. In addition, oral cancers impose a significant burden on EU economies, due to costly treatments and difficulties faced by cancer survivors to return to work. Finally, oral health professionals are ideally placed to act as frontline actors for prevention and detection of oral cancer.

The Platform for Better Oral Health in Europe fully welcomes the ambition of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to address the burden of cancer through prevention, early detection and diagnosis, care and survivorship. We are committed to working with European policymakers at the EU and national level to help enable delivery of integrated health promotion and preventive strategies to help reduce the burden of cancer on EU citizens. Improving health literacy on major risk factors and popularizing knowledge on signs and symptoms of oral cancer are key goals of our Platform for Better Oral Health.

→ Enhancing cancer prevention: oral health care in broader health promotion policies

The main risk factors for oral cancer are tobacco use, both smoking and chewing, and alcohol. In addition, over the last 20 years, the number of cancers caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) has been increasing (oro-pharyngeal cancers are now the most common HPV-related cancer in the US). These risk factors are common to many other cancers. As they routinely see "healthy" patients as part of their function, oral health teams have a key role to play to deliver preventative lifestyle advice on smoking cessation and alcohol reduction and to encourage the uptake of HPV vaccination by teens.

We call on:

→ EU Member States to recommend [new fiscal measures to support EU citizens in adopting healthy lifestyle habits](#) as part of a broader Council resolution on cancer prevention.

→ The European Commission to encourage health authorities and national governments to [fully integrate the role of oral health and oral health professionals in building robust cancer prevention and health promotion policies](#).

→ The European Commission to commit significant funds from the EU4Health programme [to encourage Member States to develop and implement cancer prevention and health promotion initiatives](#) across all EU countries at both population and community level, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups.

→ Early cancer detection increasing the role of oral care professionals

Early diagnosis and treatment are essential for reducing the burden of cancers in Europe, including oral cancers. Oral professionals have regular access to people that are at risk of developing cancer as part of a routine dental examination and play an important role in the early detection of oral cancer through simple visual inspection. Universal access to dental care therefore can play an important part in improving the health outcomes through earlier detection and diagnosis. In addition, the Beating Cancer Plan should address the increase in undiagnosed oral cancers linked to the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, which has caused the closures or curtailment of the provision of dental services and led to a significant decrease in referrals of mouth cancer to secondary care.

We call on:

→ The European Commission to issue [guidelines on how to best leverage routine dental visits for the early detection of cancer](#) and other chronic diseases.

→ The European Commission to ringfence funds from the EU4Health program to encourage health authorities and national governments [to adopt public health policies aiming to address the large and persistent socioeconomic inequalities in cancer prevention and access to care](#), through universal and targeted population approaches.

→ The European Commission to encourage and support gender neutral HPV vaccination throughout the EU to prevent HPV related cancers.



→ Reducing health inequalities in oral health to address cancer prevalence

In common with other cancers, oral cancer prevalence and survival exhibits significant social gradients. Indeed, poor oral health is influenced by a variety of social determinants, such as the community, family and individual environments. In addition, poor oral health in and of itself has also been linked to higher prevalence of a number of other cancers. A successful Beating Cancer Plan would seek to address these inequalities by including oral health promotion and prevention programmes to reduce levels of cancer across the EU.

We call on:

→ EU Member States to leverage European funding programs such as EU4Health to [support capacity building in the primary healthcare workforce](#) involving the whole range of health professionals, to promote accessibility, affordability and adequacy of oral health and cancer services.

→ The European Institutions, including the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, to [support and promote the WHO sustainable goal of universal health coverage](#), including universal access to baseline oral health services, to assist with early diagnosis of oral cancer and cancers in general.

About the Platform for Better Oral Health in Europe

About the Platform for Better Oral Health in Europe
The Platform for Better Oral Health in Europe is a joint initiative of the Association for Dental Education in Europe (ADEE), the Council of European Chief Dental Officers (CECDO), the European Association of Dental Public Health (EADPH), the Oral Health Foundation and the Pan-European Region of the International Association for Dental Research (PER-IADR). Its work is supported by GlaxoSmithKline.