

# CANCER AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Directly or indirectly, every European is affected by the devastating impact of someone with cancer. The disease not only causes immeasurable pain for the individual and the families touched by it, but it is also negatively impacting our society at large. It is well understood that **physical activity can play a crucial role in preventing cancer**, in improving cancer treatment, and for cancer recovery and increasing the quality of life of survivors.

**Cancer is one of the main killers in Europe**, with over 3 million new cases of cancer and over 1.4 million cancer related deaths in the EU, in 2018 alone. Next to the immense human cost, there are associated health care costs of over EUR 130bn annually, in addition to the wider economic impact of decreased productivity of several tens of billions of euros<sup>1</sup>. With the number of cancer cases expected to increase in the coming years, our current approach is not sustainable.

Crucially, **40% of cancer cases** could be prevented if the right measures are taken. It is a fact that currently only 3% of health budgets across Europe are being used for prevention, and yet it is quite self-evident that more attention and resources should go towards the prevention of cancer<sup>2</sup>. Fortunately, this message is beginning to resonate with policy makers in Governments across Europe, as recorded in the latest edition of the state of health in the EU<sup>3</sup>.

One of the key elements of these preventive measures should be the promotion of physical activity. The World Health Organisation, for example, stresses the

importance of being physically active in everyday life and to limit the time spent sitting, in its code for cancer prevention. **Being more physically active** is also a key recommendation of the World Cancer Research Fund in its quest to help reduce the prevalence of cancer cases. Unfortunately, however, physical activity levels in Europe are decreasing year on year, with the latest Eurobarometer stating that 46% of Europeans never exercise<sup>4</sup>. Urgent action is required to “turn the tide of inactivity”.

In addition to preventing cancer, physical activity also helps with the treatment and recovery of cancer patients. Evidence suggests that patients who maintain routine physical exercise before surgery have a reduced chance of complications and are more likely to have a quicker recovery<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, there is also evidence that **physical activity improves the quality of life of cancer survivors**, by improving both physical and mental health of cancer survivors<sup>6</sup>. The case for physical activity promotion as an integral part of the fight against cancer is clear and strong.

EuropeActive is the leading Association in Europe for the promotion of fitness and physical activity. It has a simple mission to get more people more active more often and this will help the citizens of Europe to lead healthier and happier lives.

Fitness is already the largest participation sport according to the Eurobarometer but more effort is needed to raise awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles and physical activity.

<sup>1</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/research\\_by\\_area/documents/ec\\_rtd\\_cancer-infographic.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/research_by_area/documents/ec_rtd_cancer-infographic.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/non\\_communicable\\_diseases/docs/ev\\_20200204\\_factsheet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/non_communicable_diseases/docs/ev_20200204_factsheet_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/state/docs/2019\\_companion\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/state/docs/2019_companion_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/sport/news/2018/new-eurobarometer-sport-and-physical-activity\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/sport/news/2018/new-eurobarometer-sport-and-physical-activity_en)

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.macmillan.org.uk/\\_images/the-importance-physical-activity-for-people-living-with-and-beyond-cancer\\_tcm9-290123.pdf](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/_images/the-importance-physical-activity-for-people-living-with-and-beyond-cancer_tcm9-290123.pdf)

<sup>6</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22294757>