

World Cancer Day 2020 – Let’s talk about alcohol

Today we are celebrating World Cancer Day (4th February) and the launch of Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan. The contribution of alcohol to a range of cancers needs to be better recognized. According to Eurobarometer study (2010) one in five (21%) do not believe there is an association between drinking and cancers, and roughly one in ten (12%) do not know even though the first conclusive links were established in 1987.¹ By 2035, there will be a doubling of cancer cases and 40% of all cancers can be prevented if we implement what we already know².

Europe has the highest alcohol consumption in the world with (9,8 litres of pure alcohol per person), well above the global average of 6.4 litres³. Every day in EU+ countries around 800 people die from alcohol attributable causes per year (291.000 per year)⁴ and the main cause of these deaths (29%) is cancer⁵.

Drinking alcohol is associated with a risk of developing more than 200 different types of diseases. Such as cancer development in the oropharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver, colon, rectum and breast. Even moderate alcohol intake has been shown to increase the risk of developing breast cancer.⁶ The message in relation to alcohol consumption in the European Code Against Cancer is: *If you drink alcohol of any type, limit your intake. Not drinking alcohol is better for cancer prevention.* There is no level of alcohol consumption that is safe as far as cancer is concerned.

Mariann Skar, Secretary General in the European Alcohol Policy Alliance, says: *It is high time that the forgotten link between alcohol and cancer was brought to the attention of the general public. As consumers we have the right to know about the effects of alcohol consumption on our health. There needs to be better public information, more awareness among health professionals and effective public health measures to highlight the link and promote action to reduce avoidable illnesses and deaths.*

Eurocare hopes that Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan will emphasize prevention and use the opportunity to inform the European population about the link between alcohol and cancer. Effective public health prevention can reduce the social and economic losses caused by harmful use of alcohol.

¹ Eurobarometer, 2010. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_331_en.pdf

² European Commission, 2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/health/non_communicable_diseases/events/ev_20200204_en

³ World Health Organisation, 2018.

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/274603/9789241565639-eng.pdf?ua=1>

⁴ World Health Organisation, 2019. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/alcohol-use/news/news/2019/01/every-day,-about-800-people-in-europe-die-from-alcohol-attributable-causes>

⁵ World Health Organisation, 2018. http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/386577/fs-alcohol-eng.pdf?ua=1

⁶ World Health Organisation, 2018.

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The European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with 60 member organisations across 24 European countries advocating prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. Member organisations are involved in advocacy and research, as well as in the provision of information and training on alcohol issues and the service for people whose lives are affected by alcohol problems.

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