

Alcohol and Cancer- the forgotten link

The World Health Organisation has warned about the growing burden of cancer at an alarming pace and emphasised the urgent implementation of efficient prevention strategies¹.

The often forgotten link in the prevention efforts is the one between alcohol and cancer. There is no level of consumption that is safe as far as cancer is concerned.

First conclusive links between alcohol and cancer were established back in 1987, yet 25 years later only 36% of EU citizens are aware of this link². Alcoholic beverages impact the digestive tract and contribute to development of the breast cancer³.

Given that Europe is the world's heaviest drinking region, with some European countries ranking around 2.5 times above the global average this calls for an immediate action⁴.

The contribution of alcohol to a range of cancers needs to be better recognized. 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

International Agency for Research on Cancer emphasises that lessons from cancer control measures show that prevention works but that health promotion alone is insufficient. Adequate legislation plays an important role in reducing exposure and risk behaviours.

Mariann Skar, Eurocare Secretary General, commented: *"We would like to call on all actors, public and private, to inform consumers about the link between alcohol and cancer. This could be achieved for instance through health information messages on the bottles themselves. It would be at a low cost to the public budget- a constant reminder to raise public awareness about the risks associated with alcohol consumption. We all have the right to know not only what is in our drinks but also what side effects they cause to our health"*.

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¹ <http://www.who.int/en/>

² Eurobarometer, 2010, retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_331_en.pdf

³ IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans IARC Monographs, Volume 96 <http://apps.who.int/bookorders/anglais/detart1.jsp?sesslan=1&codlan=1&codcol=72&codcch=96>

⁴ WHO Status Report on Alcohol and Health in 35 European Countries (2013) retrieved from: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/190430/Status-Report-on-Alcohol-and-Health-in-35-European-Countries.pdf



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EUROCARE (The European Alcohol Policy Alliance) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with around 50 member organisations across 23 European countries advocating the prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe.

www.eurocare.org

To find out more please visit: www.alcoholandcancer.eu

FACTS AND FIGURES ON ALCOHOL

- Europe has the highest drinking levels in the world, the highest alcohol per capita consumption and the highest alcohol- related harm problems.
- Chronic diseases, to which alcohol is the 3rd main contributory factor, are in the top of global risks next to such threats like fiscal crises and are expected to cost global economy over 30 trillion USD over the next two decades.
- €155.8 billion is the social costs attributable to alcohol in the EU on a yearly basis
- 1 in 4 of male deaths between 15-29 years are due to alcohol
- Alcohol is a major contributory factor in accidents; 1 in 4 of all road traffic deaths are caused by alcohol
- Alcohol is a risk factor in some 60 diseases such as cancer, liver cirrhosis etc. Taking all diseases and injuries at global level into account, **the negative health impact of alcohol consumption is 31.6 times higher than benefit**