PRESS RELEASE

ONE YEAR OF CANCERWATCH

CancerWatch builds stronger foundations for better cancer data across Europe

Cancer registries remain the gold standard for understanding how cancer affects populations. The rigorous methods they use to collect and standardise data lead to high quality information, but can be time consuming and resource intensive. CancerWatch is improving Europe's cancer intelligence by improving data quality and timeliness of data yet at manageable costs. To do so, a deep understanding of cancer registration in Europe is required.

One year in, CancerWatch has completed the largest survey of European cancer registries to date and key work to strengthen the data and systems behind the European Cancer Information System. Updated cancer statistics are expected before the end of 2026.

Utrecht, 28 September 2026

One year after its launch, the EU4Health Joint Action CancerWatch has completed the largest survey of European cancer registries to date, supported the 2026 Europe-wide data collection for the update in the European Cancer Information System (ECIS), and built the methods and the software needed to turn registry data into comparable survival European statistics and built complementary methods and software needed to turn registry data into comparable European statistics. Updated European figures on cancer survival and prevalence will be published in ECIS before the end of 2026.

Updated cancer figures in ECIS provide a more current picture of the cancer burden in Europe, including newly updated estimates on survival and prevalence. Survival gives us the probability of being alive some years after a cancer diagnosis. Prevalence shows how many people are living with cancer, or have lived through it, at a given moment. Together, these are the clearest measures Europe has of whether its cancer prevention and care are improving, and for whom.

What the first year delivered

- A survey of 192 cancer registries, the largest ever conducted. It gives Europe a strong baseline of how cancer registration is organised, how quickly data are delivered, how registries are funded, and how much capacity they have to innovate.
- Enhanced participation to the 2026 Europe-wide data collection for ECIS, targeted to members of the European Network of Cancer Registries (ENCR).
- A harmonised framework of quality indicators, aligned with European Health Data Space requirements supporting a more consistent approach to measuring and comparing cancer data quality across countries and showcasing the high-quality data of European registries.
- Protocols for estimating cancer survival and prevalence across European countries.
- A first version of a dedicated software tool for calculating survival and prevalence as epidemiological indicators, now in pilot testing with registries.

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- Support all registries in getting EHDS-ready — clarifying which roles are needed and how to best position cancer-registry data in the national and European catalogues, metadata catalogue, plus work on metadata standards and interoperability with the Horizon Europe project QUANTUM on data quality labelling.

> *" CancerWatch is helping to improve the timeliness and quality of European cancer indicators by making efficient use of the most recent data from cancer registries. For survival and prevalence, its added value lies in the innovative methods and tools developed within the project, which make it possible to derive these indicators from the same cancer-registry data in a timely, harmonised and comparable way. This will allow us to see which countries are making progress, which are falling behind, and whether policies are delivering results. By bringing together the data, methods and expertise needed for this large-scale European effort, CancerWatch has made a major contribution."*
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> Manola Bettio, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

We cannot improve what we cannot measure

ECIS is Europe's main source of comparable cancer statistics. It is fed by population-based cancer registries, which collect data from thousands of hospitals across the continent. If those registries are slow, incomplete, or inconsistent, the European picture is slow, incomplete, and inconsistent too. In some regions, cancer data still take more than two years to arrive.

The same logic applies to the registries themselves. Before you can improve them, you have to be able to measure their performance. That is what the CancerWatch survey has done, highlighting differences between countries.

> *"More than 90% of the cancer registries we approached completed the survey, showing the strong commitment of the European cancer registry community. For the first time at this scale, we now have a comprehensive picture of how population-based cancer registries operate across Europe – what is already working well, where challenges remain and where further support is needed. CancerWatch can build on this evidence to strengthen registries while preserving what matters most: the quality and comparability of population-based cancer data."*
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> Dr. Vesna Zadnik, Head of Slovenian Cancer Registry – Institute of Oncology Ljubljana, and WP-lead CancerWatch, coordinator of the CancerWatch European PBCR survey

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The instrument that measures Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP) is the most ambitious cancer initiative the European Union has ever undertaken to reduce the cancer burden across the EU. But whether its goals are being achieved can only be assessed through reliable, comparable data. Population-based cancer registries provide the evidence to track cancer outcomes, to identify inequalites and to assess whether prevention, screening, and treatment policies are making a difference over time.

Looking ahead

Over the next two years CancerWatch will build on these foundations. Work continues on AI-assisted cancer registration, common standards and digital tools to make data collection more complete, consistent and efficient, and on preparing registries for the European Health Data Space. Europe should be able to see the state of cancer on its own continent in something close to real time, not several years after the fact.

The point of all of it is not better data per sè. The point is cancer control: fewer people developing cancer, more people surviving it, and less difference in outcome depending on where in Europe someone happens to live. Europe cannot deliver that without knowing where it stands.

> *"Europe cannot manage what it does not measure. Without robust data systems to track progress and expose inequalities, the Cancer Plan will not deliver the results Europe needs."*
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> Romana Jerković, Member of the European Parliament

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Background

Population-based cancer registries have been the backbone of cancer surveillance in Europe for decades. They allow countries to track incidence, mortality, survival and prevalence. But differences in legal frameworks, interoperability, resources and data collection practices mean that completeness and timeliness vary widely between countries.

CancerWatch builds on the work of the European Network of Cancer Registries (ENCR), the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and international partners such as the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), aligning these efforts to deliver faster, more reliable and comparable cancer information. The work supports Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the European Cancer Inequalities Registry and the European Knowledge Centre on Cancer.

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About CancerWatch

- A Joint Action co-funded by the European Union through the EU4Health Programme, with an EU contribution of €13 million.
- Duration: 36 months (September 2025 to August 2028).
- Coordinator: Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH).
- Partners: 92 organisations in 29 countries, including 58 cancer registries.
- Funding: EU4Health Programme, Grant Agreement CR-g-24-40.
- More information: www.cancerwatch.eu

Note to editors

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