

## Alcohol can cause cancer- limit your intake

As we celebrate the World Cancer Day (4<sup>th</sup> February) and the achievements which have been accomplished in the area of cancer prevention, we need to remember about the less known causes of cancer such as alcohol consumption.

The message in relation to alcohol consumption in the new European Code Against Cancer is: **If you drink alcohol of any type, limit your intake. Not drinking alcohol is better for cancer prevention<sup>1</sup>.**

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 link<sup>2</sup>. Alcoholic beverages impact the digestive tract and contribute to development of the breast cancer<sup>3</sup>.

Given that Europe is the world's heaviest drinking region, with some European countries ranking around 2 times above the global average this calls for an immediate action<sup>4</sup>.

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.

Mariann Skar, Eurocare Secretary General, commented: *"We support the 4<sup>th</sup> European Code Against Cancer and are delighted with the clear message it conveys in relation to the consumption of alcohol. We would like to call on all actors, public and private, to help raise awareness about the fact that alcohol contributes to cancer development. We all have the right to know what side effects drinks cause to our health."*

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<sup>1</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the European Code Against Cancer released by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the European Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Eurobarometer, 2010, retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_331\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_331_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> 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](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/190430/Status-Report-on-Alcohol-and-Health-in-35-European-Countries.pdf)



## NOTES TO EDITORS:

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

To find out more please visit: [www.alcoholandcancer.eu](http://www.alcoholandcancer.eu)

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**The European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare)** is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with 57 member organisations across 25 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.

[www.eurocare.org](http://www.eurocare.org)

### Facts and figures about alcohol

- Alcohol is the 3<sup>rd</sup> top risk factor in Europe for ill health and NCDs such as cancer and cardiovascular disease<sup>5</sup>
- Alcohol is a toxic substance in terms of its direct and indirect effects on a wide range of body organs and a cause of some 60 diseases. Taking all diseases and injuries at global level into account, the negative health impact of alcohol consumption is 31.6 times higher than benefit
- 12 million people in the EU are dependent on alcohol<sup>6</sup>
- Around 9 million children in the EU are living with one parent addicted to alcohol<sup>7</sup>
- 1 of 4 road fatalities in EU are due to alcohol; in 2010 nearly 31,000 Europeans were killed on the roads of which 25% were related to alcohol<sup>8</sup>
- Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to birth defects and developmental disorders. It may cause the unborn child physical, behavioural and learning disabilities
- The social cost attributable to alcohol is 155,8 billion Euro yearly (was third is now first bullet point)<sup>9</sup>
- Alcohol is the leading risk for ill-health and premature death for the core of the working age population (25-59 year) (was first is now second bullet point)<sup>10</sup>
- Alcohol is responsible 1 in 7 male deaths and 1 in 13 female deaths in the group aged 15–64 years, resulting in approximately 120 000 premature deaths<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> World Health Organisation (2014) *Global status report on alcohol and health*

<sup>6</sup> Rhem J, Shield D (2012) *Interventions for alcohol dependence in Europe: a missed opportunity to improve public health*

<sup>7</sup> Anderson P, Baumberg (2006) *Alcohol in Europe: a public health perspective*

<sup>8</sup> European Transport Safety Council (2011) 5<sup>th</sup> Road Safety PIN Report

<sup>9</sup> Rehm, J. et al (2012) *Interventions for alcohol dependence in Europe: A missed opportunity to improve public health*

<sup>10</sup> Scientific Opinion of the Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum (2011) *Alcohol, Work and Productivity*

<sup>11</sup> WHO (2013) *Status report on alcohol and health in 35 European countries*