

## **Event Report: Cancer Prevention through Physical Activity & Public Health Engagement – How Can Europe Act?**

11 June 2025

European Parliament, Brussels

Organised by: Europe Region of World Physiotherapy

Co-hosted by: **MEP Kathleen Funchion** and **MEP Giorgos Georgiou**

In-person and online attendees – physiotherapists, academic researchers, cancer policy professionals, consultancy companies with interest in the health area, policy makers and EU institutions professionals

### **1. Executive Summary:**

The event regarding Cancer Prevention through Physical Activity brought together a diverse and dynamic group of stakeholders - policymakers, healthcare professionals, physiotherapists, researchers, and representatives from cancer organisations. Together, they shared insights, strengthened connections, and explored how integrated networks can enhance cancer prevention efforts across Europe.

This essential dialogue underscored the need for collaboration to shape a future where cancer prevention is proactive, evidence-based, and accessible for all.

### **2. Objectives of the Event:**

- To raise awareness of the role of physiotherapy in cancer prevention and care.
- To advocate for stronger inclusion of physiotherapy in national and EU-level cancer strategies.
- To showcase the UcanACT project and stakeholder voices.
- To foster collaboration across sectors and countries.

### **3. Key Messages:**

- Physical activity (PA) is a powerful tool in both cancer prevention and recovery, reducing the risk of several cancer types by up to 20%.
- Cancer remains a major social inequality issue, with prevention strategies unequally distributed.
- Physiotherapy is an essential, low-carbon, cost-effective resource in both public health and long-term cancer care.
- EU and national policy must include physiotherapy professionals in programme design, funding, and delivery.

### **4. Event Highlights and Speaker Contributions:**

- **Opening Remarks** - Emilia Kosińska – moderator, Projects Manager, Europe Region of World Physiotherapy; co-hosts: MEP Kathleen Funchion and MEP Giorgos Georgiou – both of The Left - GUE/NGL

**Emilia Kosińska** welcomed co-hosts and attendees, and introduced the agenda for the event.

**MEP Kathleen Funchion** highlighted the critical role of physiotherapy in addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and cancer and stressed the importance of prevention-focused discussions.

MEP Giorgos Georgiou shared a personal connection to cancer and addressed the broader policy context. He emphasised cancer as a social justice issue and issued a call to action aligned with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. Key points included:

- The promotion of “Health in All Policies”
- Increasing cancer incidence across the EU
- The projected shortage of healthcare workers by 2030
- The integration of physiotherapists into community-based programmes

- **Panel 1 - Evidence-Based Approaches to Cancer: Physiotherapy, Economic Perspective, and Policy** - Nele Adriaenssens – Europe Region of World Physiotherapy Cancer Working Group Member; Caroline Speksnijder – International Physical Therapists for Oncology (IPT-HOPE); Caroline Berchet – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); Alba Gil – Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL).

**Emilia Kosińska** introduced and welcomed Panel 1 speakers.

**Nele Adriaenssens** described the physiological impact of cancer and physical activity, highlighting prevention of recurrence and alignment with patient needs. Regular physical activity can prevent up to seven types of cancer and reduce the risk of relapse. She highlighted the shift in cancer care from prescribing rest to encouraging movement, noting that patients face complex physical challenges throughout their journey, comparable to the effects experienced by astronauts. Nele Adriaenssens emphasised that while the EU Beating Cancer Plan marks a significant step forward, it lacks sufficient focus on physical activity. She also presented the work of the Cancer Working Group of the Europe Region of World Physiotherapy, noting that Europe still lags in integrating physical activity into cancer care strategies.

**Caroline Speksnijder** highlighted the role of IPT-HOPE and its collaborative efforts to improve cancer outcomes. She stressed that while smoking is a well-known cause of cancer, inactivity - especially when combined with poor nutrition - is also a major risk factor. To prevent treatment side effects and support recovery, patients need to stay active both before and after cancer treatment. Caroline Speksnijder underlined the importance of collaboration between local governments, health systems, municipalities, GPs, and physiotherapists to integrate physical activity into cancer care effectively.

**Caroline Berchet** highlighted the Cancer Inequalities Registry, one of the flagship initiatives of the EU Beating Cancer Plan, which aims to address disparities in cancer outcomes across Europe. She emphasised that physical inactivity is one of the major risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), with over 40% of the cancer burden linked to preventable factors. Increasing physical activity across the population could prevent approximately 10,000 premature deaths annually. She also noted that only one-third of adults in Europe currently meet the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week. Caroline Berchet also pointed out persistent inequalities, including a gender gap among adolescents, with boys being more active than girls, and socioeconomic differences between countries. She stressed that promoting physical activity is vital for all population groups, regardless of age, gender, or background. Beyond health gains, integrating physical activity into cancer prevention and survivorship care also offers significant economic benefits, including reducing costs related to professional inactivity or difficulty in return to work. Sharing best practices among EU Member States is essential to narrowing these gaps and achieving more equitable cancer prevention outcomes.

**Alba Gil** focused her intervention on equity in cancer care and the urgent need for factual political commitment, particularly from the European Commission. She emphasised that while cancer mortality rates are decreasing, recurrence is on the rise, stressing that beating cancer is not the final step but part of an ongoing journey for people with lived experience. Alba Gil underlined the critical role of physical activity in prevention and survivorship and called for tangible investment and concrete action, urging policymakers and authorities to put real funding on the table. She highlighted that social determinants such as poverty, education, and social exclusion remain the primary risk factors. While some Member States are beginning to address these through national initiatives - particularly around healthy diets - much more needs to be done. Alba Gil warned that political inaction perpetuates inequity, and called for a renewed social contract that places public health at the heart of policymaking. To achieve this, she advocated for a clear 'Health in All Policies' approach and prioritisation of public health across all sectors.

**- Panel 2 - Project Presentation: UcanACT** - Fran Theron – Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP); Devin Bayer – Outdoor Against Cancer (OAC); Michele Cannone – Italian Physiotherapy Association (AIFI); Janette Boran and Katherine Peacock (Kilkenny County Council); Luis Mendoza Hernandez Sanahuja – ONCE University School of Physiotherapy (ONCE); Carmen Suárez Serrano and Esther Medrano Sánchez – University of Sevilla

**Emilia Kosińska** introduced and welcomed Panel 2 speakers, also noting all the Consortium present at the event: Rita Stagni - University of Bologna, who oversaw the creation of the UcanACT App, and the remaining members of the ONCE University School of Physiotherapy Team - Irene Rodríguez Andonaegui, Susana García Juez, João Miguel Mota de Sousa, and Guiomar Martín San Gil.

**Fran Theron** introduced the UcanACT project, highlighting its focus on integrating physiotherapy early in the cancer care pathway. She explained that engaging physiotherapists at the initial stages of treatment can reduce overall health service use by improving outcomes and preventing complications. Fran also noted that physiotherapy represents a low-carbon alternative within healthcare, contributing both to better patient care and environmental sustainability.

**Devin Bayer** continued the session by presenting UcanACT's activities in Munich, noting that the German pilot site focused primarily on cancer patients due to the host organisation's – OAC – specific profile.

**Michele Cannone** presented the Bologna pilot territory and outlined AIFI's approach to organising physical activity sessions. He noted that Bologna stands out as a leading municipality in Italy for its strong engagement in public physical activity initiatives and the broad availability of such programmes for its citizens.

**Janette Boran** and **Katherine Peacock** gave insights into the Kilkenny territory, emphasising community engagement and diverse recruitment strategies, including local newspaper ads and community centre announcements. Kilkenny County Council created cross-sector collaboration involving senior physiotherapists from the public and private sectors and provided University of Limerick physiotherapy students with opportunities to gain practical experience under expert supervision.

Following the pilot territories' presentations, a compilation video with highlights from the physical activity sessions participants was presented.

Continuing with key findings from the UcanACT project, **Luis Mendoza Hernandez Sanahuja** presented the key quantitative and qualitative results, highlighting that the UcanACT physical activity programme led to significant improvements in quality of life and physical activity levels, alongside a notable reduction in fatigue. He emphasised the qualitative feedback, which revealed a strong emotional, motivational, and relational impact. Luis Mendoza Hernandez Sanahuja also stressed that physiotherapists played a central role in UcanACT's effective delivery.

**Carmen Suárez Serrano** and **Esther Medrano Sánchez** concluded the UcanACT presentation with an overview of a study on the economic value and cost-effectiveness of physical activity as a cancer-preventive measure. Carmen Suárez Serrano explained that, based on findings from selected randomised controlled trials, most studies reported improvements in patients' quality of life, with higher-intensity exercise linked to reduced physical fatigue. The economic impact of such interventions varies depending on the type of cancer, timing of the intervention, and whether costs are evaluated from a medical or broader social perspective. Esther Medrano Sánchez emphasised the need for further research in this area, highlighting it as a valuable opportunity to build stronger evidence for physical activity in cancer prevention.

## **6. Panel Discussion: Policy Integration**

Europe Region of World Physiotherapy General Secretary, **Aitor Carpio García**, took the opportunity to address the co-host **MEP Kathleen Funchion** with the question about how can policymakers influence inclusion of cancer prevention at national level.

In response, MEP Kathleen Funchion emphasised several key actions: the importance of raising awareness and ensuring that clear, impactful messaging reaches the right audiences, as important messages often get lost along the way. She highlighted the role of intergroups and interest groups in promoting initiatives like UcanACT and called on national governments to take cancer prevention more seriously, aligning more closely with EU leadership. However, MEP Kathleen Funchion acknowledged that funding remains a persistent challenge in moving prevention efforts forward.

**Juliana Azevedo de Sá** of the European Cancer Organisation congratulated the UcanACT Consortium on the successful project and commented that the project clearly proved survivor-focused approach as successful, and added that framing cancer prevention and physical activity as "fun and life-enhancing" is needed for wider public appeal.

## 7. Closing Remarks

**Esther-Mary D'Arcy**, Chair of the Europe Region of World Physiotherapy, delivered the closing remarks, thanking all speakers and participants for their valuable contributions. She emphasised the importance of physiotherapy reaching out to the community, rather than expecting individuals to seek out physiotherapists within traditional healthcare settings. She emphasised the physiotherapist's dual role as both a movement expert and a motivator who empowers participants, supporting behavioural change as demonstrated in the UcanACT project. Esther-Mary D'Arcy also highlighted the value of community connection in sport, noting student participation in Ireland and stressing the importance of future physiotherapists engaging in community projects.

**Emilia Kosińska** thanked all speakers and participants before closing the event.

## 8. Key themes for progress in the cancer prevention through physical activity:

- Sharing best practices across Member States.
- Advocacy for funding through EU programmes.
- Strengthening data collection and evaluation.
- Continuous engagement with policymakers and cancer survivors.

## 9. Annexes:

- Presentation slides – access the slides [here](#).
- Event recording – watch on [YouTube here](#).

- List of speakers in the order of presentation:

Emilia Kosińska – Projects Manager, Europe Region of World Physiotherapy

MEP Kathleen Funchion – co-host

MEP Giorgos Georgiou – co-host

Nele Adriaenssens – Europe Region of World Physiotherapy Cancer Working Group Member

Caroline Speksnijder – International Physical Therapists for Oncology (IPT-HOPE)

Caroline Berchet – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Alba Gil – Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

Fran Theron – Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP)

Devin Bayer – Outdoor Against Cancer (OAC)

Michele Cannone – Italian Physiotherapy Association (AIFI)

Janette Boran – Kilkenny County Council

Katherine Peacock – Kilkenny County Council

Luis Mendoza Hernandez Sanahuja – ONCE University School of Physiotherapy (ONCE)

Carmen Suárez Serrano – University of Sevilla

Esther Medrano Sánchez – University of Sevilla

Esther-Mary D'Arcy – Europe Region of World Physiotherapy