



**ESMO Statement for the
70th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (virtual)
14-15 September 2020**

Agenda Item 4: The European Programme of Work (2020–2025) – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”

Honourable Chair, Esteemed Delegates,

The [European Society for Medical Oncology \(ESMO\)](#) is the leading professional organisation for medical oncology. It is the society of reference for oncology education and information. Our membership is comprised of more than 25,000 oncology professionals from over 160 countries, and more than 50% of our membership is in Europe.

ESMO welcomes WHO Europe’s **European Programme of Work (2020-2025) – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”**, and its ambitious goals to work within the European Region towards the WHO’s triple billion targets and the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals, taking into consideration the necessities of post-COVID-19 recovery and reform. We agree that citizens have the fundamental right to good health and well-being, universal access to care without financial hardship, to live in safe, supportive, and healthy communities, to have healthier choices, and to enjoy health security.

As a professional academic society of cancer professionals, ESMO fully supports the European Programme of Work, and welcomes actions dedicated to:

- Optimize and protect the current health workforce, plan for future educational and training needs, and improve the workforce’s geographical distribution.
- Ensure the provision of palliative care services to relieve unnecessary pain and suffering, because [WHO statistics](#) state that of the estimated 40 million people in need palliative care each year, only about 6 million currently receive it.
- Improve the use of digital technologies to bridge the gaps in inequalities in healthcare, while respecting data protection regulations.
- Promote prevention initiatives, such as tobacco cessation, which are essential to reduce the growing burden of NCD’s and cancer worldwide.
- Build back better with preparedness for emergency responses that protect the health workforce and ensure continued access to essential health services, especially for those living with immune-compromised illnesses like cancer.

ESMO encourages the goals under Core Priority 1 to include:

- Ensuring robust referral systems between primary and secondary/tertiary levels of care where cancer is treated.
- The prevention and management of shortages of inexpensive essential medicines, including those on the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, because medicines shortages have become a growing public health emergency, highlighted now more than ever during COVID-19.

ESMO feels WHO Europe’s European Programme of Work accurately states the important and crucial leadership role that WHO must continue to play to coordinate public health efforts with other stakeholders at the regional and sub-regional level through support of Member States and supranational dialogues. Tackling public health issues like shortages of inexpensive essential medicines cannot be done by one country alone – and the inequalities between countries, and within countries, indicate the urgent need for increased coordination and efficiency.

ESMO stands ready to do its part to help achieve the European Programme of Work, and would be pleased to:

- Participate in WHO Europe’s regional platforms and supranational consortiums to support continuing professional development for the cancer workforce, and the implementation of global cancer initiatives on cervical, breast, and childhood cancer. ESMO is currently collaborating on these projects with the cancer team at WHO Headquarters.
- Leverage ESMO’s engagement with the European Union authorities, and work with WHO Europe’s Ambassador to the European Union on cancer prevention and control initiatives across the Region.
- Support WHO’s efforts related to COVID-19 by complementing WHO’s guidance with [ESMO’s COVID-19 and Cancer Portal](#) that includes, among other resources, the [ESMO management and treatment adapted recommendations during the COVID-19 era](#) for the management of cancer patients, and a [Guide for Patients](#).

Thank you.