



## EQUITY IN ACCESS:

### Promoting a Cervical Cancer Prevention Strategy for Europe

**6 June 2012, European Parliament, Brussels** - In celebration of the *European Week Against Cancer*, **Nessa Childers**, MEP from Ireland, Vice President of **MEPs against Cancer (MAC)**, and **Alojz Peterle**, MEP from Slovenia, President of **MAC**, in conjunction with the European Institute of Women's Health, held a Roundtable entitled: "*Promoting a Cervical Cancer Prevention Strategy for Europe*" to discuss the need for a multi-pronged European cervical cancer prevention strategy.

**Cervical cancer can largely be prevented. Yet, it kills many women in Europe and worldwide.** "*This cancer strikes women in their 30s and 40s at a time when many are bringing up families or concentrating on their careers. Cervical cancer physically and emotionally burdens women, impacts on their children, family and friends, as well as placing medical and economic costs on society*", said **Nessa Childers**, Vice President of MAC.

Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women under the age of forty-four. In the EU, 34 300 women develop and 16 300 die from this cancer annually with higher rates in new Member States.<sup>1</sup> On average, there are 175 000 women living with cervical cancer in the European Union at any given time.<sup>2</sup>

#### Preventing Cervical Cancer is within our reach

Today, European women have the unique opportunity to benefit from significant advances to tackle cervical cancer through a two-pronged strategy:

Organised population-based screening programmes for the early detection of cervical lesions and vaccinating adolescent girls against the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) prior to first HPV exposure.

Yet, not all women across the EU-27 are benefiting from best practice and this cancer remains a major cause of death for women in CEE countries: Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Baltic States. Analysis of cervical cancer data shows that the death rate was highest in Lithuania and lowest in Finland. **Patron of the EIWH, Mrs. Kwaśniewska** stated that: "*Annually over 4000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in Poland of whom 2000 will die. We call on policymakers and politicians to act now and implement programmes to avoid needless suffering and death.*"

#### Disparity in Cervical Cancer Prevention

In 2008, the Commission published *European Guidelines for Cervical Cancer Screening in the European Union*<sup>3</sup> revealing that cervical screening and prevention practices vary greatly between countries and more vigorous efforts are necessary to cover EU-wide population groups at risk. In some new Member States and other Eastern European countries, the incidence and mortality rates

<sup>1</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer. 2008. *European Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Cervical Cancer Screening*. 2nd Edition.

[http://screening.iarc.fr/doc/ND7007117ENC\\_002.pdf](http://screening.iarc.fr/doc/ND7007117ENC_002.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> European Cervical Cancer Association (ECCA). 2009. *Cervical Cancer Prevention*. <http://www.ecca.info/en.html>.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission. 2008. *Cancer Screening in the European Union*.

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/archive/ph\\_determinants/genetics/documents/cancer\\_screening.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/archive/ph_determinants/genetics/documents/cancer_screening.pdf).

are double those seen in the EU-15. This disparity results from a lack of properly organised prevention programmes and allocation of financial resources. Prevention programmes coupled with effective health education and awareness programmes to encourage women to utilise services, thereby decreasing the burden of cervical cancer and promoting more equitable healthcare for all women across the EU.

*“Cervical cancer is an example of existing health inequalities as not all women across the wider Europe are benefiting from best practice of its prevention,”* said **Gunta Lazdane**, Sexual and reproductive health programme manager, Division of Non-communicable Diseases and Health Promotion, WHO/Europe.

### **European Partnership - Action against Cancer**

Cancer is still a major killer in Europe. Yet many people are unaware that some cancers can be prevented. WHO says up to 40 %. Much depends on how well we are informed, what we know about prevention measures and if we are willing to change our lifestyle. The *European Week Against Cancer* encourages people to make lifestyle changes and take appropriate prevention measures as outlined in the *European Cancer Code*. [www.cancercode.eu](http://www.cancercode.eu)

The Partnership, a joint action between the European Commission, Member States and key stakeholders has set ambitious targets: **100% population screening coverage by the end of 2013** and a reduction of 15% in new cancers by 2020.<sup>4</sup> *“I am pleased that the efforts of **MEPs against Cancer** and the **Slovenian EU Presidency** encouraged the setting up of this Cancer Partnership. We now need to act and prevent all cancers that can be prevented by integrating screening and vaccination in the next phase of the cancer guidelines supported by the EU Health Programme”*, argued **Alojz Peterle**, President of MAC.

On behalf of the EIWH, **Hildrun Sundseth** Board Member, stated: *“We have the knowledge to stop cervical cancer from starting in the first place. To achieve the goals of the European Partnership – Action against Cancer, we need to share best practice in prevention much more forcefully and apply know-how consistently and equitably in Europe,”*. While Director General **Peggy Maguire** added, *“Women’s groups and health NGOs such as ours must join forces with politicians to spread the prevention message to all who need to know and encourage sustainable investment into prevention programmes. Importantly, we must pay specific attention that hard to reach women are included in our efforts.”*

### **For More Information**

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<sup>4</sup> EPAAC. 2012. <http://www.epaac.eu/>